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Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the successive stages to make changes in the Polish development policy after 1989. The national administration reform of 1990 in the Third Commonwealth of Poland restored the local government after 40 years of non-existence during the time of Polish People's Republic (1944–1989) that was a satellite state of the Soviet Union after the Second World War. Another reform took place in 1998 as a part of preparations for the country's membership in the European Union (EU) from 2004. Currently developed strategic documents are suggesting the use of the "polarization and diffusion model of the development." The authors also discuss the regional policy currently implemented in Poland, which was designed in years 2009–2014. The process of creation of new policy includes plans to reform the policy instruments and to update the strategic framework. Conclusions highlight a need for a clearer division of powers between the center and regional governments and the importance of strengthening the financial basis and institutional capacity building.

Keywords: Cohesion Policy, Horizontal Strategic Framework, Polarization and Diffusion Model, Regional Policy, Transition in Post-communist State

INTRODUCTION

Changes in the Polish development policy after 1989 have been one of the most important fields of reforms after the fall of the Communist regime. In 1990, the local government in the Third Commonwealth of Poland was restored after 40 years of non-existence during the time of Polish People's Republic (1944–1989).

This chapter presents the most important stages of the creation of a local government in Poland after 1989. It especially underlines reform that took place in 1998 and further changes related to the country's membership in the European Union (EU) since 2004. The chapter also focuses on the description and critique of the "polarization and diffusion model of the development" that is currently promoted in the strategic documents in Poland. This model is one of the main innovations in the regional policy that is currently implemented in Poland and which was designed in the years 2009–2014.

In the conclusions, a further need for a clearer division of powers between the center and regional governments is highlighted as well as future research directions.

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

REFORMS BETWEEN 1989–1999

In Poland, after 1989, there have been many changes that were primarily the result of economic reforms. In addition, although these changes covered in principle almost all aspects of the economic life of the country, they were focused mainly on macroeconomic issues (Pietrzyk, 2002, p. 363). Therefore, virtually no action has been taken in the field of regional policy. The government hoped at that time that there would be a spontaneous adjustment of regional economies to the new free market conditions (Węclawowicz, 2002, p. 151).

This approach to local and regional level had an impact on the growth in the following years. Among other things, we can observe that in the years 1990–1993 regional issues were not included in the implementation of measures to combat the spatial concentration of unemployment (Brzozowski, 2005, p. 108). In the government, there were no appropriate organizational structures to deal with the issue of the regional development. However, a part of ongoing post-1989 reforms and implemented activities also contributed, somehow occasionally to the regional development in the subsequent years.

An example is the Act of 8 March 1990 on the Municipal Local Government, under which the local self-government units (municipalities; pol. *gmina*) was established. According to the European statistics (Eurostat), these municipalities are units at the lowest level (5) in the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). The Polish word *gmina* comes from the German word *Gemeinde*, which means the “community.” At the same time, however, the Act disbanded the national councils, which represented the local authorities at the regional level (voivodeships; pol. *województwa*). As a result, the new law created the situation in which there were no strong entities capable of leading an efficient policy in the intra-regional dimension.

The new model of state administration had a dual nature because of government bodies, and local self-government communities (municipalities) exercised power (Kornaś, 2005, p. 140). The government complex administration was maintained only at the provincial (regional) level and subordinated to the province governor (pol. *wojewoda*) as the government representative in the area. In addition, the so-called regional offices of the administration were established and chaired by the managers appointed by the provincial governors. These managers were not elected in the democratic elections. However, the introduction of the local government in Poland was a pioneering action among post-communist countries. Thus, this solution was a reference to the tradition of the Second Commonwealth of Poland (1918–1939).

The powers of the local government are focused to this day on the following matters: (1) spatial and ecological order; (2) technical infrastructure; (3) social infrastructure; (4) public order and security. The responsibilities of the municipalities include all public matters of local importance, which are not reserved by the law to other entities. The municipality may also undertake an obligation to carry out the orders of the government administration, as well as tasks related to the organization of the preparation and implementation of general elections and referendums. The municipality may perform tasks of the government administration also based on an agreement with the authorities of this administration (for example, specialized government agencies). The municipality may also perform tasks from the competence of the county (pol. *powiat*) and tasks from the jurisdiction of the province (pol. *województwo*) based on the agreements with such units.

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

The Municipal Council (pol. *rada gminy*) was established as the main legislative body of the local government (Wojnicki, 2007, p. 1247) while the Municipal Board is the executive body. Since 2002, the Municipal Board has been single-person, it is: the mayor in rural communities (pol. *wójt*); the mayor in municipalities (pol. *burmistrz*) or president (pol. *prezydent*) in cities with a population over 100 thousand inhabitants and in those municipalities where previously the head of the city government was also called the president. *Wójt, burmistrz* or *prezydent* are elected by universal, equal, and direct elections.

Another change, which although it was not directly aimed at regional development but has contributed to it, was the establishment of special economic zones (Brzozowski, 2005, p. 109). These zones have been for years classified as one of the most important instruments of regional policy in Poland. The zones provide tax incentives for business entities in the form of tax reliefs and exemptions. The Zones were formed in 1995 under the Act of 20 October 1994 on the Special Economic Zones. The local authorities have submitted applications for the establishment of special zones, and the decision to create zones was undertaken by the Polish government because of the regulation.

The main task of the zones was to establish the more favorable business conditions than those available outside the zones. Creation of them resulted from the need to combat unemployment by creating new jobs; the existence of unused economic infrastructure; and the need for the strong restructuring centers and industrial districts. The legislature also expected that the zones would be aimed at the activation of the regional communities to which zones belong. The formation of special economic zones was also justified by the particular economic interests of the state, the protection of which required the elimination of public and legal burdens and introducing some privileges for investors engaged in economic activities of the zones. Thus, zones have a tendency to stimulate investment of business entities not only with the domestic but also foreign capital.

The rules governing the zones are in conflict with the laws of the EU. This is due to the ban, for example, of some overdeveloped supporting industries (such as metallurgy of iron and steel, automotive industry), as well as the prohibition of export preferences. According to the law of the EU, the states may grant aid in special economic zones only in regions with the particularly low standard of living and serious, very high level of unemployment (Cichowski, 1998, p. 24). From the outset, most reservations of the EU aroused the high tax preferences and subsidies in the field of customs and forms of financing of special economic zones from the state budget. The dissatisfaction expressed by the EU on this issue caused the discontinuation of the investor exemption from taxes.

When it comes to the activities related to the EU, Poland on 16 December 1991 ratified the Association Agreement with the EU, which was the first step towards European integration and full membership in its structures. The Agreement discussed the problems of regional development. Among others, the discussion included issues such as the closer cooperation in the field of regional development by providing information on regional policy to authorities, as well as assistance in the development of such policies in justified cases. The regional development support programs that were implemented by the EU in Poland were a manifestation of this support. Because of cooperation between the Polish government and the European Commission, the Task Force on Regional Development in Poland was created that operated from September 1995 to July 1996. The Task Force prepared, among others, a report titled the "Outline of Polish

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

Regional Development Strategy,” which included recommendations to the government with a list of the most necessary actions (Brzozowski, 2005, p. 110).

However, no decision was taken on further reform of the territorial administration of the country. Therefore, at the regional level still there were no administrative units that could be responsible for the implementation of the intra-regional policy (Brzozowski, 2005, pp. 111–112). However, in the 1 January 1997 the government established the Center for Strategic Studies that handled the regional development planning. Moreover, under the Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of 25 November 1997 on the Establishment of Standing Committees of the Council of Ministers the Standing Committee for the Regional Development was also appointed, which was an auxiliary and consultative body for the government. The Committee consisted of numerous ministers in particular. There were no representatives of the ministries of economy and finance who would be key experts on regional policy among the members of the Committee. The scope of Committee’s activities was much narrower than suggested by the Task Force.

Then the work of the Task Force on Regional Development was continued by another team called the Task Force for Structural Policy in Poland, which was appointed by the government and the European Commission. The team operated from September 1996 to August 1997. Similarly, to the previous team this entity gathered the representatives of the central government, local governments, national and international experts, and representatives of science and business environments. As a result, the working groups created studies on various aspects of structural policy. The final report titled the “Polish Structural Policy in Perspective of Integration with the EU” included analysis of the situation and recommendations for the government. The Task Force negatively rated the implementation of reforms and proposed a number of solutions, primarily related to a central body, which pursued the regional policy of the state (Task Force for Structural Policy in Poland, 1997). The Ministry of Economy was selected to perform this function after that.

NEW MODEL OF REGIONAL POLICY BETWEEN 1999–2004

In 1998, when already the Polish Constitution came into force on 17 October 1997, further political reforms were undertaken. One of them was the reform of the local government, which resulted in the creation of two higher than local municipalities (pol. *gmina*) levels of local government units: the county (pol. *powiat*) and the region (pol. *województwo*). A complete change of government shape was made under the two Acts of 5 June 1998: on the Powiats Government and the Regional Government. Until this point, Poland had 49 provinces and 2,300 municipalities, which were created in 1975. As part of the reform 16 provinces and 315 local government counties were established on 1 January 1999.

The appointment of specific counties was based on the Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of 7 August 1998 on the Creation of Powiats. Referring to the interwar tradition (1919–1939), the restoration of the county (pol. *powiat*) as a unit of local self-government became necessary in the context of erosion of the state activity in many areas of social life. Powiat is a territorial unit of NUTS 4 level that is equivalent to a county, district, or prefecture. Powiat has been appointed to perform the higher duties than local *gminas* such as, for example, technical infrastructure, social infrastructure, environmental protection, combating unemployment, the spatial economy, defense, and promotion of tourism. Powiat contains smaller *gminas* and with other powiats is a

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part of the voivodeship. A group of powiats creates the units on the NUTS 3 level such as departments in France or districts in Germany.

The introduction of the provincial government (pol. *województwo*) meant the establishment of a new form of regional community. The activity of provincial government, with the legal personality, cannot restrict the independence of county and local municipalities. In Poland, the term province (region) has two meanings: (1) a local government unit of regional self-governing community, and (2) it is the largest unit of basic territorial division of the country to perform public administration. *Województwo* is equivalent to the region or the province in many other countries. Voivodeships are the units on the NUTS 2 level while the groups of regions create the units on the NUTS 1 level. Regional authorities carry out more important tasks that need more coordination among others in areas such as the creation of the regional strategy, public education (including higher education), social assistance, combating unemployment, specialist healthcare, land management, and construction supervision.

By the Act of 5 June 1998 on the Regional Government, the responsibility for the implementation of development policies at regional level rests on the Voivodeship authorities. To this end, the regional authorities are preparing development strategy, which should take into account the territorial dimension according to the Act of 24 January 2014 Amending the Act on Principles of Development Policy and Other Acts. One of the requirements laid down by the law is that the preparation of the regional development strategy should take into account the objectives of the medium-term national development strategy, the national strategy for regional development, relevant sub-regional strategies, as well as the goals and directions of the spatial development concept (The Act of June 5, 1998 on the Regional Government; The Act of 5 June 1998 on the Government Administration in the Voivodeship; The Act of 24 July 1998 on the Introduction of the Three-tier Division of the Country; The Act of 24 July 1998 Amending Certain Laws Defining the Powers of Public Authorities).

The model of regional policy in Poland expected that the basic strategic documents specifying the directions of regional policy interventions would become Voivodeship development strategies developed by regional governments in the first years of their operation after 1999. Unfortunately, the provincial government had well-defined tasks but was not equipped with sufficient financial resources for effective implementation of the intra-regional policy, which constituted a direct obstacle to the proper implementation of the state's regional policy objectives, particularly in the period prior to 1 May 2004, which was before joining the EU.

With the administrative reform, the provinces received legal personality, property, and a separate budget. Regional government is represented by the council (parliament) and board. Voivodeship Council is a body that constitutes the regional law and undertakes control. In contrast, the regional board is headed by the Marshal and is the executive body. The Board performs its duties through the Marshall Office, provincial government agencies, and provincial legal entities that are creating the self-governing provincial administration. At the same time, the province governor (pol. *wojewoda*) is the representative of the central government and holds power associated with the public administration (Kornaś, 2005, p. 141). In terms of regional policy, the province governor also plays a significant role as it is responsible for the implementation, coordination, and control of the government policy in the region. The province governor is, therefore, an entity implementing an inter-regional policy coming from the center while in the hands of the regional government (council and board) remains the intra-regional

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

policy (Brzozowski, 2005). Supervision of the activity is exercised at all levels of local government by the province governor and the Prime Minister of Poland and in terms of financial affairs by the Regional Chamber of Audit.

A fundamental change in nature and scope of regional policy in Poland, which was a foregone conclusion because of the solutions from reform of 1998, required the preparation of other statutory regulations. This process was also associated with the need to adapt Polish solutions to the changing model of cohesion policy of the EU (Szlachta & Zaleski, 2010, p. 39). In the next edition of the legal basis for regional policy in Poland, attention should be primarily paid to the Act of 12 May 2000 on the Principles of Promoting Regional Development. This Act was a contribution to the adoption by the Council of Ministers on 28 December 2000 of the National Strategy of Regional Development 2001–2006. This strategy constituted a basis for action at national and provincial levels. The strategy established the principles, criteria, and mechanisms for formulation and implementation of regional development policy in Poland. The strategy was also a basis for programming the mid-term regional development policy. As the mission of the National Strategy of Regional Development was to specify the adaptation of Polish regional policy model to the standards of the European cohesion policy, which was a prerequisite for the use of the Structural Funds and Cohesion Fund in Poland. Priorities of the National Strategy of Regional Development 2001–2006 were: (1) the enlargement and upgrading of the infrastructure needed for improving the competitiveness of regions; (2) the restructuring of the economic base of regions and its diversification; (3) the development of human resources; (4) the additional support for areas endangered by marginalization due to natural conditions; and (5) the development of international cooperation of regions (Ministry of Regional Development and Construction, 2000). This strategy was also the basis for applying for funds from pre-accession programs of the EU: PHARE, ISPA, and SAPARD (Grochowski & Rzeźnik, 2010, p. 151). This strategy, however, was not based on solid diagnostic foundations. To a limited extent, the strategy referred to provincial programs, which generally were often very ambitious.

The document, which was to serve the main objective of the National Strategy of Regional Development 2001–2006 was the Support Program for 2001–2003 (Council of Ministers, 2002). The Support Program contained the problem areas of regional policy, which were also called as areas of support. This program presented the following priorities: (A) the expansion and modernization of infrastructure to enhance the competitiveness of regions; (B) the restructuring of the economic base in provinces and creation of conditions for its diversification; (C) the development of human resources; (D) the support for areas requiring activation and threatened with marginalization; (E) the development of cooperation between regions. The activities within the framework of the priorities of A, B and C can be implemented throughout the country. In contrast, the actions of the priority D can be applied only in support areas distinguished on the basis of at least one of the following criteria: (1) GDP per capita in the region was less than 80% of the average GDP per capita in the country (as in 1998); and (2) the unemployment rate in counties was exceeding in each of the last three years 150% of the national average of unemployment rate (as at March 1 and December 31 in 1998, 1999, and 2000). Taking into account the criteria mentioned above, the existence of 161 counties as priority areas of support in the priority D was revealed. When it comes to activities under the priority E, they were able to be implemented in areas of support that were divided based on the criterion of adhesion of powiats groups (NUTS 3 level) to a land border or sea border of the country. Based on these criteria 17

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

sub-regions (NUTS 3) were separated, and selected counties (NUTS 4) in the sub-region of Opole were considered as support areas of priority E.

On 16 March 2004, the next document called the Support Program for 2004 was published (Council of Ministers, 2004). The government in connection with the entry on 1 May 2004 of Poland to the EU was considering withdrawing from this type of document and implementing the Regional Operational Programmes, as is the case in the other Member States of the EU. Ultimately, however, the government did not decide on such a solution and 2004 was considered as a transitional period during which existing rules were to apply to regional policy programming and at the same time new procedures arising from the Polish accession to the EU were implemented.

Assumptions of the Support Program for 2004 were consistent with the objectives of the National Strategy of Regional Development 2001–2006 (Ministry of Regional Development and Construction, 2000). The program still assumed the realization of the general goal that was to promote the socio-economic development of the country and its various regions to strengthen competitiveness, increase living standards, and increase social cohesion. Cohesion was defined in relation to the economic, social and spatial relations and both internal and external relations with countries and regions of the EU. It was assumed that the general goal of the Support Program for 2004 would be implemented under two priorities. Priority I was: “The development and modernization of technical and social infrastructure in the region” and Priority II was a “Stimulating of economic and social initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life of the inhabitants of the region.” The activities within these priorities were focused on the promotion of cohesion in each of the analyzed dimensions. The actions were implemented in support areas designated at the level of NUTS 3 units (sub-regions) because in May 2004, Poland became a member of the EU and in accordance with the criteria of the regional policy of the EU, the whole territory of Poland was recognized as the problem area. Thus, all sub-regions of Poland can benefit from assistance under the Support Program for 2004.

The concretization of regional policy resulting from the Act of 12 May 2000 on the Principles of Promoting Regional Development and the National Strategy of Regional Development 2001–2006 was made with the use of “regional contracts” for 2001–2002, which were later extended by 2003. These contracts were the primary instrument of control of the development process during this period. Regional contract is a civil law contract that allows the government to support regional development programs in the region created by the provincial government together with social partners. The aim of the contracts was to strengthen the autonomy of the newly created regional government, mobilization of resources for regional development, and regional coordination of sectoral interventions implemented by the ministries of the central government at the regional level.

Limited financial resources for the implementation of regional policy, which were allocated to the provincial governments, constituted a direct obstacle to the proper implementation of the state’s regional policy objectives, particularly in the period prior to 1 May 2004. This situation did not change the fact of the start of the pre-accession programs in 2000 (Churski, 2009a, p. 5). In addition to the PHARE program from which the funds were available in Poland since 31 May 1990, when the framework agreement was concluded between the European Commission and the Government of the Republic of Poland, there were the ISPA and SAPARD programs. Their support provided by the EU accelerated the process of building both the institutional foundations

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

of a new model of Polish regional policy, as well as a co-financing source for the implementation of specific investment projects.

Aid programs, however, could not replace deficiencies in the regional redistribution of the state budget. The reason for the problems of redistribution was the insufficient size of the budget, which was compensated by the access to European funds. Unfortunately, this trend continued in the first period of Poland's membership in the EU, which led to a pragmatic solution, which became a "replacement" of provincial contracts—the basic instruments of regional policy implementation—with the Regional Operational Programmes that provided access to a much larger, relative to the state budget, funds from the European Structural Funds.

EUROPEANIZATION OF REGIONAL POLICY IN POLAND

The quest for unification and relying on the law of the EU can be seen by comparing the records of Polish laws to the content of the applicable government standards, for example, in the European Charter of Local Self-government (Dębski, 2014, p. 221).

Changes made in the administration related to cohesion policy meant the gradual introduction to the practice of the public sector management standards and requirements proved in other countries of the EU (Ministry of Regional Development, 2008). Adaptation of foreign models and solutions meant "Europeanization" of regional policy in Poland. This process cannot be avoided, because a number of institutional, organizational, substantive directions, as well as investment funds from European institutions, need to be taken into account or implemented through the national public authorities. At the same time, the national authorities—primarily government administration—participate in the elaboration and negotiation of cohesion policy at the level of the EU (Grosse, 2013, p. 79).

In addition, a feature of development policy in terms of Europeanization is the division of the policies into European policies in (cohesion) and domestic politics (referred to as a country's regional policy). Among them, there is a strong mutual relationship. The proof is that the dominant part of the country's regional policy in Poland is financed by investment funds earmarked for the implementation of cohesion policy. At the same time, there is a need to separate national policies in relation to the European policies, which serves two primary purposes. Firstly, there is a need to define own (national) development goals to effectively co-create policy at European level. For example, it is necessary to create the country's regional policy to negotiate effectively direction and aims of European cohesion policy. Secondly, the national development policy can pursue what will not be covered by policies of the EU. It should be remembered that the policies of the EU are the result of negotiations between the European community institutions (mainly the European Commission and the European Parliament) and between the 28 Member States. It is, therefore, the resultant of different purposes and interests, not always fully reflecting the priorities of Poland. For that reason, it is necessary to create the national development strategies (Grosse, 2013, p. 79–80).

The strategic document in the field of the regional policy was initially the Programme of Regional Development 2004–2006 (Ministry of Economy and Labour, 2003). The Programme was established by the Act of 20 April 2004 on the National Development Plan, which adjusted Polish regional policy to the European cohesion policy. This document was prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Council Regulation No 1260/99 (European Commission,

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

1999) and was a legal and organizational basis for the absorption of resources of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund by Poland for the period 2004–2006. It became the core document for a new organization of regional policy in Poland in the first years of membership in the EU (Churski, 2009a, p. 41).

The strategic objective of the National Development Plan was to develop a competitive economy based on knowledge and entrepreneurship. It was assumed that the implementation of the strategic objective would be carried out by achieving the following specific objectives: (1) creating conditions for achieving and maintaining high long-term GDP; (2) increasing the level of employment and education; (3) the inclusion of Poland in European networks of transport and information infrastructure; (4) the intensification of the process of increasing participation in the economic structure of sectors with high added value; (5) the development of technologies for information society; (6) supporting participation in development and modernization processes of all regions and social groups in Poland.

The Act of 13 July 2006 Amending the Law on the National Development Plan and Certain Other Acts was designed to eliminate errors of the first period of the absorption of structural funds. Moreover, the law limited the period of validity of the rights to the period 2004–2006.

Priorities, directions, and sources of funding for regional policy in the first years of Poland's membership in the EU were defined in 2004 in the Integrated Operational Programme of Regional Development (IOPRD) (Ministry of Economy and Labour, 2003). Due to the size of the budget created largely by means of the Structural Funds, the IOPRD became a new and significant in the years 2004–2006 instrument of Polish regional policy (Churski, 2008). Access to structural funds, which this instrument provides meant that its implementation, to a much greater extent than the intervention made by regional contracts, brought significant results.

The strategic objective of the IOPRD was in line with the primary aim of the National Strategy of Regional Development 2001–2006 (Ministry of Regional Development and Construction, 2000). In addition, the priorities proposed in the IOPRD referred to the respective priorities of the National Strategy of Regional Development and the criteria under the two pillars of the National Development Plan: (1) high and sustainable growth and (2) employment growth. This solution allowed the preservation of full complementarity of activities conducted in the framework of Poland's regional development policy and with cohesion policy of the EU, which directly served the objectives of the National Strategy of Regional Development 2001–2006. The IOPRD priorities were I. "Development and modernization of infrastructure to enhance the competitiveness of the regions;" II. "Strengthening the development of human resources in the regions;" III. "Local development;" and IV. "Technical Support."

Implementation of the National Development Plan was implemented in 2004–2006 also with the support from the specific Sectoral Operational Programmes: (1) The Human Resources Development; (2) Improvement of the Competitiveness of Enterprises; (3) Restructuring and Modernization of the Food Sector and Rural Development; (4) Transport; (5) Fisheries and Fish Processing; and (6) Technical Assistance 2004–2006.

In the meantime, the government decided to create a separate ministry—the Ministry of Regional Development. It was established 31 October 2005 based on the separation of departments from the structure of the Ministry of Economy and Labour. Key activities carried out by the Ministry of Regional Development were defined as: preparing and discussing with the European Commission strategic and program documents concerning the destination of the funds

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

allocated to the country by the EU; supervising sound management processes, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the programs co-financed by cohesion policy; management of national operational programs and coordination of the implementation of the sixteen regional programs for the implementation of which local governments are responsible. Eight years later, on 27 November 2013 by the merger of the Ministry of Regional Development and the Ministry of Transport, Construction, and Marine Economy the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development was created.

In 2006, the Act on the Principles of Development Policy was adopted. The Act defined the framework of the socio-economic development policy regime for 2007–2013 in Poland. According to the provisions of this Act, the Council of Ministers and local government are directly responsible for the development policy in Poland. The Council of Ministers adopts strategic and operational documents that are crucial to the implementation of development activities oriented territorially, which are government development strategies and programs and the operational programs. In contrast, provincial governments, county governments, and municipal governments are responsible for the preparation of operational documents and development programs that should take into account the directions and priorities for intervention in the territorial dimension. The provincial government is also responsible for the preparation of development strategy at the regional level.

In addition, the Act on the Principles of Development Policy specifies a system of strategic documents operating in Poland. In the Act, it was pointed that the development strategies relating to regions are the national strategy of regional development, transregional strategies, and the development strategies of provinces.

According to the Act on the Principles of Development Policy, objectives of Poland's regional policy since 2007 are defined in the two key documents. These are the National Development Strategy 2007–2015 in the field of national development policy and the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007–2013: National Cohesion Strategy in relation to measures related to the EU policy. The above documents included detailed rules and procedures in the various dimensions of the implementation of regional policy. These issues are regulated at the operational level through documents of a lower level, published by the minister of the regional development (Grochowski & Rzeźnik, 2010, p. 153).

The National Development Strategy 2007–2015 was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 29 November 2006 and was the primary strategic document setting out the objectives and priorities of development policy, and taking into account the trends described in the strategic documents and policies of the EU. The National Development Strategy defined the objectives and priorities of development policy in the perspective of 2007–2015 and the conditions that should encourage this development. The rationale behind the creation of this type of document was the fact that although there were many positive changes after 1989, Poland remained in the group of poorest countries of the EU. As the main, long-term strategic document, it constituted a point of reference for other strategies and programs of central and regional government (Ministry of Regional Development, 2006b).

The National Development Strategy 2007–2015 defined in detail the conditions and premises for the development of Poland and described the socio-economic situation as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the country. In this document, opportunities and threats arising from the Polish participation in the EU were analyzed, the basic dilemmas of development were listed

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

and the vision of Poland until 2015 was presented. The strategy described particularly in detail the main objective and concrete objectives and conditions of their implementation. The main objective of the National Development Strategy 2007–2015 highlighted the activities aimed at promoting social cohesion and was framed as follows: “To raise the level and quality of lives of Poland’s residents: individual citizens and families” (Ministry of Regional Development, 2006b, p. 24).

The main objective of the National Development Strategy 2007–2015 highlighted activities aimed at the promotion of social cohesion. The realization of this objective was defined in the structure of the six priorities: Priority I. “Growth of competitiveness and innovativeness of the economy;” Priority II. “Improvement of the condition of the technical and social infrastructure;” Priority III. “Growth of employment and raising its quality;” Priority IV. “Building an integrated social community and its safety;” Priority V. “Development of rural areas;” and Priority VI. “Regional development and raising the territorial cohesion.”

Comparing the changes that occurred during the period of 2004–2006, and the next programming period 2007–2013 it should be noted that these were mainly symbolic changes in the documents, which did not introduce significant changes as regards the reform of cohesion policy. First of all, in the case of programming principles the government resigned from two separate documents: the National Development Plan and the Community Support Framework, and replaced them with a single document titled the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007–2013: National Cohesion Strategy (NSRF). This document was prepared under the guidelines of the EU that defined the main objectives of cohesion policy and with regard for socio-economic conditions of Poland. The NSRF set out the main directions of support from the funds that were available to the budget of the EU for the period 2007–2013, in the framework of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Cohesion Fund. The NSRF represented a point of reference for the preparation of operational programs that were taking into account the provisions of the National Development Strategy 2007–2015 (Ministry of Regional Development, 2006b) and the National Reform Programme for 2005–2008 (Council of Ministers, 2005) that were responding to challenges described in the Lisbon Strategy (Ministry of Regional Development, 2006a, p. 4).

The strategic objective of the NSRF was to create conditions for the growth of competitiveness of an economy based on knowledge and entrepreneurship, employment growth, and an increase of cohesion in the social, economic and spatial terms. Thus, this objective combined increasing the competitiveness of the economy with an increase in the cohesion. It was assumed that the process of social and economic cohesion of Poland and Polish regions in terms of the average of the EU would follow through structural reforms and concentration of funds in these areas that were critical to economic growth and an increase in employment. The proper implementation of the objectives contained in the NSRF depended directly on the formulation and implementation of operational programs serving the expenditure of structural funds (Rajkowska, 2008, p. 40, 43).

Regional policy instruments for achieving the objectives contained in the NSRF were: Thematic Operational Programmes (Infrastructure and Environment; Innovative Economy; Human Capital; the Development of Eastern Poland; Technical Assistance); 16 Regional Operational Programmes; and the European Territorial Co-operation Operational Programmes. Except the Regional Operational Programmes, all programs were managed at the national level.

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

The Operational Programmes included the following specific horizontal objectives: I. “Improving the functioning standard of public institutions and development of partnership mechanisms;” II. “Improving the human capital quality and enhancing social cohesion;” III. “Establishment and modernization of technical and social infrastructure crucial for the better competitiveness of Poland;” IV. “Improving the competitiveness and innovativeness of enterprises, including in particular the manufacturing sector with high added value and development of the services sector;” V. “Increase of the competitiveness of Polish regions and preventing their social, economic and territorial marginalization;” and VI. “Balancing growth opportunities and supporting structural changes in rural areas.”

Projects that serve to the implementation of the National Cohesion Strategy (NSRF) have been undertaken based on five Operational Programmes: Operational Programme—Infrastructure and Environment; Regional Operational Programmes; Operational Programme—Human Capital; Operational Programme – Innovative Economy; the Operational Development Programme of Eastern Poland; the Technical Assistance Operational Programme (cf. Churski, 2008); and 16 Regional Operational Programmes. This meant maintaining the number of Operational Programmes at the same level as in 2004–2006 and replacement of IOPRD by the 16 Regional Operational Programmes. In addition, the Operational Development Programme of Eastern Poland had a regional character and referred to the special intervention undertaken in units at the level of NUTS 2 in the least developed regions of the country. In the case of the rest of Operational Programmes, many of their priorities also received a regional character. Allocation of funds from the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund in the system of these programs was the result of the diagnosis of the socio-economic situation of the country and adopted the direction of the growth. This allocation is an evidence of the significant decentralization of regional policy and the management of EU funds.

It should be emphasized that in addition to the above-mentioned regional policy instruments there are still functioning regional contracts. The role of regional contracts is limited, however, being a simple redistribution of public funds from the central level to the regional level, in which the role of the state budget amounts to provide co-financing of national contribution for intervention under the Structural Funds and is associated with the transfer of very limited funds to the regions that are in form of the special purpose grants and are consequence of the implementation of the provisions of the Budget Law (cf. Churski, 2008).

2009–2014: CIVILIZATIONAL PROJECT POLAND 2030

The practical result of discussions and amendments to the Act of 6 December 2006 on the Principles of Development Policy was the creation of a new strategic order. The principles alluded to the report “Poland 2030” (Boni, 2009) of the Board of Strategic Advisors to the Prime Minister of Poland and the decision of the Council of Ministers in 2009 regarding the new system of the development management in Poland, which had to allow the creation of an efficient mechanism for ensuring implementation of strategic programming of the state development goals (Ministry of Regional Development, 2009). The government decided, therefore, to strengthen the role of development policy as superior to all sectoral policies, domain-specific policies, and regional policies. In addition, it was the beginning of a new generation of hierarchical long-term and medium-term strategic documents that aim to integrate

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

social, economic, and spatial dimension of development (Ministry of Regional Development, 2013, p. 8). Concurrently, these new principles allow to create the new order of strategic documents and to limit their number to necessary. Also, the adoption of new documents of the EU such as the Europe 2020 strategy influenced the content of the national strategic documents (European Commission, 2010).

The Council of Ministers on 13 July 2010 adopted the “National Strategy of Regional Development 2010–2020: Regions, Cities and Rural Areas (NSRD)”—a strategic document relating to a policy of socio-economic development of Poland in regional terms. This strategy sets out the objectives of regional policy towards the different regions of the country, in particular, the division into urban and rural areas and defines their relationship in reference to other public policies with a strong territorial orientation. The NSRD also outlines how public entities, in particular, the central government and regional governments have to act to achieve the strategic objectives of national development (Ministry of Regional Development, 2010).

The NSRD highlights the three main objectives of the regional policy until 2020: Objective 1. Competitiveness—to support the growth of competitiveness of the regions; Objective 2. Cohesion—building a territorial cohesion and preventing marginalization of problem areas; and Objective 3. Efficiency—creating conditions for efficient, effective, and partnership implementation of development activities that are territorially oriented. The NSRD assumes further strengthening of the role of regions in achieving the development objectives of the country and, therefore, contains proposals to change the role of provincial governments in this process and proposals to improve the participation of other public entities. Regional policy is understood more broadly than ever before—as a public intervention realizing the development objectives of the country by actions aimed territorially and the principal level of which remains planning and implementation of the regional system (Ministry of Regional Development, 2010).

In the NSRD, similarly to subsequent policy documents, the “polarization and diffusion model of the development” has been adopted and defined. In this model, the priority is supporting the most competitive sectors of the economy and urban centers in Poland (polarization) as well as ensuring of the diffusion of benefits with the use of a range of instruments. This diffusion requires strategic interventions in regional policy and involves the introduction of instruments and structures that will allow creating different configurations of institutions (stakeholders) involved in coordinating and policy-making. The polarization and diffusion approach aims not only at further decentralization of responsibilities, transferring them to the local government administration in the regions, but also focuses on the more active approach to coordination of activities between ministries at the central level and agencies (Ferry, 2009, p. 174).

However, the polarization and diffusion model of the development cannot be regarded as too plausible as the NSRD does not refer to the well-described and recognized in the economic literature theories, such as the growth poles theory (Perroux, 1988), the geographical growth centers theory (Hirschmann, 1958), a model of core and peripheries (Prebisch, 1959; Friedmann, 1973), the endogenous growth theory (Romer, 1994), and the new economic geography (Krugman, 1995). In addition, the etymology of the term is questionable as linking to the phenomenon occurring in process engineering with the phenomenon of electricity. It should be emphasized that the diffusion phenomena in the engineering process consist of the spontaneous passage of molecules from the media with a greater concentration in the centers with their lower

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

concentration under the influence of potentials (Szlachta & Zaleski, 2010, p. 43). Meanwhile, regional policy should focus more on the acceleration of development growth from the development centers as a result of the implementation of public policies. Therefore, we should conclude that referring to the polarization and diffusion model in the NSRD is rather a reference to a particular political idea, which sees the historical polarization of income in the territorial dimension after 1989 (Boni, 2009). In addition, the model is a will to find effective policies that will accelerate the natural processes of transferring the socio-economic growth in peripheral areas.

It should be emphasized that the new paradigm of regional policy in Poland presented in the NSRD draws heavily from the new approach to the conduct of development policies introduced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the debate on the territorial cohesion and future of cohesion policy of the EU (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015, p. 18).

A key element of the new paradigm of development in Poland is the assumption that in accordance with the principle of an integrated territorial approach and geographical concentration for different types of areas designated in the NSRD there will be directed consistent, multi-sectoral, and long-term set of actions to encourage the development of particular areas (Ministry of Regional Development, 2011; Żuber, 2011). An integrated approach is oriented to the needs of the territory by combined intervention of various types of entities (public, commercial, and governmental), and related activities undertaken by bodies at different levels of management (multilevel governance). The result of the integrated territorial approach should be the design of public interventions specifically for the territory that are derived from a number of policies, with the involvement of various actors at the national level, regional level, and local level. By better targeting of public resources, the territory-specific development processes are strengthened (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015, p. 20). The principle of geographical concentration involves directing the public intervention into separate geographical areas to activate and strengthen the use of their development potential. These areas are delimited in the domestic strategic documents in a functional way, which is beyond the administrative borders and are defined by certain characteristics (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015, p. 20). As noted in the National Spatial Development Concept 2030 (Ministry of Regional Development, 2011) functional planning on the areas highlighted by means of geographical features based on socio-economic issues through a comprehensive approach will more accurately define the specific development potential and comprehensively resolve conflicts occurring in given area.

The NSRD addresses the issue of reconciling the various interests of national development that are related to the competitiveness of regions and its strengthening in the country and in the international arena as well as with the prevention of possible excessive and socially and politically unacceptable inter-regional and intra-regional differences. This strategy is therefore oriented on the dilemma of targeting the regional policy of the equalization and efficiency. The mindset used in the NSRD is consistent with the direction proposed in the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion: Turning Territorial Diversity into Strength (European Commission, 2008) that postulates better use of development potentials of the territories that are regionally differentiated. The Green Paper also refers to the third dimension of cohesion policy of the EU—

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

to the territorial dimension alongside with social and economic dimensions (Ministry of Regional Development, 2010).

In addition, the NSRD introduces the category of areas to which the regional policy will be specifically targeted, which are called as areas of strategic intervention. These areas include: (1) basic spaces of concentration of socio-economic development processes of the country and regions (the main urban centers together with their functional environments); (2) areas beyond the direct impact of the main centers that require strengthening potentials to develop and create or improve conditions for increasing the absorption and spread of focused development processes in major urban centers; and (3) the problem areas or territories with the highest concentration of negative phenomena and a range of national or supra-regional importance issues (Wiktorowski, 2011).

On 25 September 2012 the medium-term strategy, the National Development Strategy 2020 was adopted (Ministry of Regional Development, 2012). It sets the strategic areas and interventions that are necessary for the achievement of development objectives in the perspective of 2020. The strategy puts special emphasis on activities aimed at strengthening regional potentials, the most promising in the context of strengthening the sustainability of developmental effect. A key task of the state is to ensure the internal cohesion of the country that will enable participation of all regions in the development and to prevent excessive spatial differences. The National Development Strategy 2020 focuses on selected strategic areas: (1) the efficient and effective state; (2) the competitive economy; and (3) the social and territorial cohesion.

On 11 January 2013, the Long-term National Development Strategy 2030 was published (Chancellery of the Prime Minister, 2013). Its strategic objective is to improve the quality of life of Poles, which will be measured by the growth in GDP per capita, increase of social cohesion, and the reduction of territorial inequality. The Long-term National Development Strategy 2030 sets three strategic areas: (1) the competitiveness and innovation (modernization); (2) the balance of the development potential of Polish regions (diffusion); and (3) the effectiveness and efficiency of the state.

The development objectives of the Long-term National Development Strategy 2030 are to be carried out mainly by the medium-term National Development Strategy 2020 as well as through integrated strategies. Successively approved nine integrated development strategies replaced the existing sectoral strategies. Integrated strategies focus on innovation and efficiency of the economy; transport development; energy security and the environment; regional development; human capital development; development of social capital; sustainable rural development, agriculture and fisheries; efficient state; and the development of Poland's security system.

In addition to the national development strategies, there have also been created relevant documents that relate to the supra-regional level. Transregional strategies adopted in Poland fit into the international, European, and national changes in the perception of the role of regional policy, which is a policy aimed at supporting the different territories in an integrated way. One of these territories is the macro-regional area (NUTS 1 level) functioning between the regional and the national level of support for development processes. This means moving away from thinking about the development enclosed within the administrative division of the country and the transition to the understanding of territorial development as mobilizing the potential of the delimited area by its functional characteristics (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015, p. 25).

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

Transregional strategies prepared in Poland are part of the national management system of development, which assumes the implementation of development goals set at the national and regional level through the introduction of a new generation of documents that integrate social, economic, and spatial dimension of development (Ministry of Regional Development, 2009). In this hierarchical system of national development programming, the transregional strategies have been placed between the designated national level of government intervention described in strategic documents (long- and medium-term), and the levels of prescribed interventions at the regional level—resulting primarily from the development strategies of provinces.

One of the assumptions of preparing transregional strategies is the presupposition that the cooperation of provinces across borders will give benefits that will translate into the socio-economic development of the macro-region. It is also assumed that the combination of potentials of individual regions leads to synergies and thereby improves their use in development policy (Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, 2015, p. 25).

In 2014 in Poland four transregional strategies developed for four separate macro-areas came into force: (1) Strategy for socio-economic development of the Eastern Poland to 2020—covers an area of Lublin voivodeship, Subcarpathian, Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie, and Warmian-Masurian; (2) Strategy for the development of the South Poland 2020—covers an area of two regions—Lesser Poland and Silesian; (3) Strategy for development of the Western Poland 2020—it covers an area of the province of Lower Silesia, Lubusz, Opole voivodeship, Greater Poland, and Western Pomerania; and (4) Strategy for the development of Central Poland for 2020—covers an area of Masovian and Łódź voivodeship.

The national operational programs indicate potential areas in which the implementation of transregional projects is possible. In 2014–2020, the list included: Operational Program Infrastructure and Environment 2014–2020; Operational Programme Intelligent Development 2014–2020; Operational Program Digital Poland 2014–2020; Operational Program Knowledge Education Development 2014–2020; and Operational Program Eastern Poland 2014–2020.

In contrast, at the regional level again Regional Operational Programmes for each of 16 provinces have been developed. They refer to the above-described horizontal strategies, most often focusing on the compatibility of regional objectives with the aims of the strategy for the macro-area. From the records of most of the Regional Operational Programmes, it looks that there is an awareness of the impact of the strategy to improve the coordination of the activities carried out in the given region within the framework of the measures from the European Fund for Strategic Investments and national funds.

It is also worth noting that development strategies, including transregional strategies, have to take into account a spatial dimension of the planned intervention. Therefore, it is about the goals and directions of sustainable development of the country as defined in the National Spatial Development Concept 2030 (Ministry of Regional Development, 2011). This concept was adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 2011 and is the most important strategic document for spatial planning of Poland's territory. The concept introduces the interdependence of spatial policy objectives with the objectives of regional policy, and in this way breaks with the dichotomy of spatial planning and socio-economic development that existed until recently. According to the adopted in the National Spatial Development Concept 2030 integrated approach to development, the country's space is seen as an area of differentiation of progress and effects of the processes of socio-economic, environmental and cultural development vision, and

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underlines the importance of spatial conditions for optimum use of endogenous potential. The aim of spatial planning policy is an effective exploitation of the entire Polish territory for achieving the development objectives under the premise of the sustainable development. In the National Spatial Development Concept 2030, also areas requiring particular support in the development processes were identified. These areas are of the low development potential and insufficient spatial integration with the rest of the country that negatively affect the prospects for their development.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the beginning of reforms in the 1990s, regional policy in Poland was not the significant area of action. The Domination of actions strengthening the country at the macroeconomic level was the intentional procedure. However, the changes also indirectly led, to a certain extent, to changes in the conditions of regional development. Over time, the entry into the structure of the EU created the need for measures aimed at adaptation to the expectations of membership. Then there was important for the European policy issue of regional development in the country. Poland could no longer ignore this issue and was required to take action that would allow for the proper preparation of the country to new conditions.

Unfortunately, as it turned out—and is clear from a longer centralized administrative traditions in Poland—the shaping of the main goals of programming in regional policy was in a certain way “committed” to a European level, which together with stakeholders at the governmental level began to define strategies for regional development in the country. Meanwhile, the role of regional administration was limited primarily to the implementation functions. On the other hand, we must note, however, that thanks to the Europeanization of politics in Poland it was possible to introduce a number of principles of good governance in the administration, which helped to improve the quality, effectiveness, and transparency of administration in Poland.

However, regional policy in Poland should become more and more the domain of regions, which should be carried out in a deliberate way and supported by appropriate analysis. Regional governments should play a key role in planning development programs and selection of individual projects, in accordance with their development strategies. It is also necessary to organize partnerships at regional and local level. It is important, however, at the same time that the regional governments should receive directly from the central level the EU funds earmarked for subsidizing projects, and thus also the settlement of the carried out projects should be less centralized than it is in the current approach.

It is worth noting, however, that the slow changes occur in the creation of regional policy. When we check the content of the Long-term National Development Strategy 2030, we can see numerous changes for the better.

Firstly, there is a clear focus on the territorial oriented model of regional policy, which is reflected in the focus on the potential of endogenous development of all regions of Poland alongside with more selective, territorially targeted interventions.

Secondly, it seeks to integrate regional interventions at all levels to create a unified regional policy, which can contribute to all public entities.

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

Thirdly, the action is taken to indicate the direction of strategic intervention areas for regional policy. The direction is presented in terms of both areas facing serious development challenges, as well as areas that, due to their particular characteristics affect the development of the whole country.

New regional and development policy in Poland introduces some instruments and structures to facilitate the implementation of their goals. The whole process focuses on, for example, various configurations of the authorities to improve the coordination and implementation of policies (for example, the major urban centers and their surrounding areas have to create so-called agglomeration associations). Moreover, efforts are taken towards further decentralization of responsibilities to regional governments.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Further research on the process of regional development in Poland should be conducted based on comparisons with other countries, not only from Europe. It is advisable to identify the best practices in the development of regional policy with limited or even lack of centralization of the process. In Poland, limiting the centralization of such activities, due to administrative traditions, is a very difficult task, but necessary for the proper operation of the further development of regions. It is, therefore, important to seek and modify new solutions that have already been proven worldwide.

The preferred direction of future research, in the context of regional policy in Poland, is also to identify the level of regionalization in the countries of the EU. Often in the literature, scholars emphasize that the Europeanization of structural policy only lead to superficial regionalization (Grosse, 2013). Creation of administrative units for maintaining the cohesion policy of the EU in different countries does not bind obviously with granting greater powers and supply to administrative units with their resources.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we focused on the description of changes in the local government system and regional policy in Poland. The analysis was narrowed down to the stages of development of local public administration and public policies after 1989. In other words, this chapter takes a critical look at reforms undertaken in the Third Commonwealth of Poland that restored the local government after 40 years of nonexistence.

We divided four phases of the development of the local government system and regional policy: (1) between 1989-1999 that was characterized by building of democratic institutions in relation to the free market economy, (2) between 1999-2004 that was a time of political reforms after the change of Polish Constitution came into force and a time of preparation for the membership in the EU, (3) between 2004-2009 when in Poland important reforms of regional policy have been undertaken in relation to Europeanization, and (4) between 2009-2014 when the civilizational project “Poland 2030” has been conceptualized and operationalized. The description of these stages was complemented by a discussion of the key assumptions and goals defined in the legal documents and strategic documents of the Polish government.

Finally, we underlined barriers and challenges to the development of local government system and regional policy. The example of nearly 25 years of experience of Poland in building

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democratic institutions and changing relations between the state, civil society, and commercial entities may be interesting for other countries in the Eastern Europe, Moreover, it may be important for policymakers and scholars in officially recognized potential candidate countries (that is Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey) and countries that signed an EU Association Agreement (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine).

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Europeanization of Regional Policy: Adaptation of the European model, institutional arrangements, organizational solutions, substantive directions, and investment funds in regional policy in post-communist countries, the new Member States of the EU after 2004.

Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS): The standard of geocoding developed in the European Union for identification of the statistical units.

Operational Programme: A document is covering the whole of coherent strategic priorities, the achievement of which will be sought by means of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to create the convergence with the other Member States of the European Union. The main elements of the operational program usually include: (1) the analysis of the socio-economic sector or the region; (2) the main objective and specific objectives; (3) the directions of spending public funds for the implementation of programs; (4) the method of monitoring and evaluation of achieving the primary objective and detailed objectives; (5) a financing plan containing sources of financing of the program, the amount of funds allocated to finance the implementation of the program, its allocation among individual priorities, and information about the amount of co-financing at the level of programs and priorities; (6) the implementation system.

Polarization and Diffusion Model of the Development: supporting of the most competitive sectors of the economy and urban centers (polarization) supplemented by the diffusion of benefits with the use of a number of instruments (including decentralization of responsibility, improvement of coordination, promotion of the bottom-up development).

Regional Contract: A contract for financing the operational program funds from the state budget, state special purpose funds, or from foreign funds, which is concluded by the minister of the regional development with the region, based on terms and conditions created by the Council of Ministers.

M. Klimczuk-Kochańska, A. Klimczuk, *Changes in the Local Government System and Regional Policy in Poland: The Impact of Membership in the European Union*, [in:] U. Sadioglu, K. Dede (eds.), *Theoretical Foundations and Discussions on the Reformation Process in Local Governments*, IGI Global, Hershey, Pa 2016, pp. 328-352.

Regional Operational Programme: A planning document that is setting out the issues and actions that the regional government bodies take or intend to take to promote the development of the region. The operational document that elaborates the regional development strategy and is dependent on this strategy.

Special Economic Zone: The part of the territory of the country in which economic activity can be conducted on preferential terms. Entities, which are authorized to operate in the zone, are entitled to the use of public assistance such as tax exemptions.