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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON THE BACKGROUND OF A GENERAL THEORY OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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The article focuses on a presentation and discussion of the concept of "sustainable development" (SD). It contains an analysis of the concept, its characteristics, objectives and principles of implementation. Particular emphasis has been placed on presentation of the unique features of sustainable development that distinguish it from other theories of regional development. Therefore, the discussion has been preceded by a discussion of the term "regional development". The article presents the most frequently discussed interpretations of the term, highlights its properties as well as the causes and effects of the different definitions and meanings given to the concept.

regional development, sustainable development, theories of regional development

1. THE ESSENCE AND FEATURES OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The debate about regional development, methods of its identification and measurement, its aims, factors of growth or the scope of the concept being analysed has been taking place in Europe for many years. In Poland the discussion takes on new importance every couple of years, chiefly because of the changes occurring in the political, administrative and geopolitical sphere. The breakthrough came not only together with the political system changes at the end of the 1980s, but also with the 2nd stage of self-government reform, introducing the regional self-government in Poland in 1999. Moreover, impact was created by Poland's accession to the European Union and the resulting new concept of domestic regional policy, largely shaped by the regional policy defined at the EU level [Sekuła 2010, p. 423].

The basic and, at the same time, primary goal of the management of administrative and spatial units is development [Strzelecki 2011, p. 376]. It is generally understood as a state which can be detected, described and, with the use of appropriately selected properties, compared with the previous state, evaluating the difference between the two states [Kudłacz 1999, p. 16]. Regional development is associated with an area described as a region. This concept is used in many academic disciplines, such as geography, ethnography, economics, sociology, architecture, philology, etc. As pointed out by C. Wren, the academic world is showing a growing interest in regions and their various aspects. One of the measures of this trend may be the number of publications devoted to the broadly defined issues of regions. In just one of the leading international journals concerned with regional issues, *Regional Studies*, the number of articles in a single edition of the periodical in late 1980s was between 30 and 40. These days, there are nearly twice as many — about 60 [Wren 2009, p. 452].

The interpretation of a region can be limited to the economic and administrative sphere. With regard to the economic aspect, in 1963 Meyer identified three approaches to the definition of a region [Wren 2009, p. 457]:

- internal homogeneity with respect to certain variable characteristics, e.g. unemployment or an activity,
- existence of a relationship between surrounding peripheral areas and the urban centre of the region,

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- policy-based approach concerning the institutions appointed to implement policies in the region, whose decisions are administratively coherent.

There are no fewer approaches and definitions with regard to the interpretation of the term "regional development" [e.g. Parysek... 2008; Chądzyński... 2007]. Generally, it may be assumed to mean the socio-economic development taking place in the region. It includes the increase in the region's economic potential, involving a permanent improvement of its competitiveness and in the standard of living of its inhabitants. In other words, it is a process of positive quantitative and qualitative changes occurring on many planes and in many spheres, e.g. economic, cultural, social and political sphere.

In specialist literature a few principal trends in defining the term regional (and local) development can be identified. Usually, its three fundamental features are mentioned, which include: subjectivity, multidimensionality, continuity [Sekuła 2005, pp. 588-590].

The first attribute highlights the importance of subjects — self-governments, local communities, entrepreneurs and other environment institutions, taking part in creating the development of the territory. The second attribute emphasises the multidimensional character of development. It is occurring on many diverse planes simultaneously, although at different rates. Opinions are divided about which areas should be identified. In the most extensive form, six dimensions are recognised, i.e. economic, social, spatial, cultural, political and environmental dimension. Quite often, due to the merging of the different dimensions, they are aggregated to three or four spheres. While describing the concept under consideration, we can emphasise not the dimensions it applies to, but its continuity (the third feature of the term analysed) and the changes generated by development, which is a process, does not happen on a one-off basis and, once the assumed target has been achieved, it is possible and necessary to strive for continued improvement, that is, further development. It includes actions [Sekuła 2011, p. 110]:

- taken by the authorities, local community, entrepreneurs and social and cultural organisations, with the leading role performed by the authorities.
- taking advantage of the factors of growth,
- aiming at the improvement of the standard of living of the population, as well as of the conditions for the businesses operating within its boundaries.

Considering the present-day challenges, it can be said that development takes place if a region exports goods and services, develops its infrastructure and uses its many diverse resources, innovative enterprises operate in its area and all these processes are supported by active and competent public authorities [Flejterska... 2008, p. 47].

Regional development can also be viewed in a simplified way and defined more broadly as an improvement in the quantitative and qualitative and qualitative state of a specific territory. We experience development if there is "more and more" in a particular area, which indicates quantitative growth, e.g. with regard to roads, parks, schools, average salary and the number of businesses, or if it is "better and better", e.g. repaired roads and school buildings, renovated parks, the economy is regarded as more modern, which is identified as qualitative progress. However, two reservations must be expressed with regard to the above statement. The first element of assessment is far easier to measure and therefore more frequently used in evaluations and comparisons. Secondly, the "more and more" category also includes situations where low indicator values are desirable, e.g. in the case of unemployment rate.

More specifically, regional development is a process accompanied by long-lasting growth of economic potential, systematic and permanent improvement in competitiveness and in the standard of living of the population [Chądzyński... 2007, p. 43]. It consists of processes driven by factors that have an impact on the character, direction and pace of socio-economic changes, as well as changes brought about by pro-growth factors leading to the fulfilment of tasks that make up the regional policy [Churski 2008,

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p. 34]. This definition indicates not only the relationship between regional development and the changes occurring in the socio-economic dimension of a particular area, but also its association with regional policy, whose implementation is connected with the presence of unequal stages of development. Its role is to activate the objectives of regional development [Chądzyński... 2007, pp. 34-35].

2. FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (SD)

SD is a concept that emerged in the public life of countries or regions in the second half of the 20th century. First used at a conference in Stockholm [Declaration..., 19/03/2012] in 1972 it was clarified twenty years later, in 1992, at the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The next conference, held 10 years later in Johannesburg in 2002, placed so much emphasis on SD that, though officially titled the second Earth Summit, it is often referred to as the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

In more and more countries, SD defines the course to be taken in the governance of local units, regions, countries, or even larger areas consisting of groups of countries. In 1997, sustainable development became a political goal of EU, which included it in the Maastricht Treaty [Szabó 2011, p. 256].

SD leads to qualitative and quantitative changes in a particular area, while having regard for the natural environment and ensuring the implementation of the social equality policy. This theory results from the search for a kind of development that would, above all, minimise the adverse effects of the technological revolution, as well as prevent conflicts in spatial management manifested chiefly in degradation of the environment. It refers to the concept of a policy that gives consideration to efficiency criteria and social aspirations to justice and equality. The basic aspect of the concept discussed is continuous improvement in the standard of living of local communities achieved by means of social, economic and environmental factors [Gruchman 2000, p. 66]. The development should take place in a way that would not interfere with any of these spheres, which applies to the environmental, as well as the socio-economic aspect. Thus, any decisions concerning a particular region should be: economically efficient, socially acceptable and ecologically friendly. Particular attention should be paid to economic growth which, by contributing to the increase of society's wealth and improvement in its standard of living, has a positive effect on the remaining areas.

Apparently, the concept of SD, although somewhat differently defined by individual researchers, usually refers to the three spheres of public life, also known as orders, i.e. the social, economic and environmental order. The achievement of objectives in each area leads to the improvement in the standard of living, the principle of SD being the harmonisation and association of objectives related to environmental protection, economy and the social sphere rather than setting them against each other. This approach makes it possible to define SD as a process of economic growth occurring with respect for the resources and valuable features of the environment and considering the principle of social justice and equality. These criteria, that is, economic efficiency, social acceptance and environmental protection, have been included in the following definitions of SD, stating that:

- it is "...a process including social and economic changes, whereby — to guarantee equal chances in access to the environment to the individual societies and their members, both at present and the future generations — political, economic and social activities are integrated while preserving environmental balance and the permanence of fundamental social processes" [Toczyski 2004, p. 47],
- it is "...socio-economic development, accompanied by a process of integration of political, economic and social activities, maintaining the environmental balance and the permanence of fundamental natural processes in order to ensure that basic needs of the society or citizens in the present and future generations can be satisfied" [Act..., art. 3, point 50]¹,

¹ In German: "sozialwirtschaftliche Entwicklung, in der ein Integrationsprozess politischer, wirtschaftlicher und sozialer Maßnahmen unter Beachtung des Gleichgewichts der Natur und des Fortbestehens grundlegender Na-

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- „... development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission), Escobar... Jan2011, p. 39].

Sometimes the above areas are referred to as the pillars of sustainable development [Pereira..., p. 735].

The definition also implies a long-term nature of sustainable development and development of a country or region. The concept of justice applies not only to the present generation, but also to future ones. A policy pursued in accordance with the requirements of sustainable development is far-sighted and aimed at the achievement of long-term objectives. Its results will be visible in several decades, since it looks ahead to more distant future, by ensuring the functioning of at least the next generation.

In short, the above spheres cover the following areas of activity:

- the social sphere: actions concerning demography, social care, education, communication, culture, security, health care, unemployment, housing,
- the economic sphere: actions concerning the industry, services, agriculture, labour market and tourism, with respect to the structure and dynamics of growth,
- the environmental sphere: the natural environment, spatial development and activities having an impact on their functioning.

Activities aimed at improving the quality of life make it possible to put the idea of sustainable development into full effect by exerting impact on the aforementioned areas.

3. SUMMARY

Although sustainable development is a relatively new category of socio-economic development, the very idea of generating regional development has been in existence for far longer. Specialist literature is extensive in this respect, describing more than a dozen different concepts. The most frequently quoted are: the location theory, growth pole theory, integrated development, sustainable development and eco-development theory, the neoclassical theory, the post-Keynesian theory, the endogenous growth theory and the economic base theory. A characteristic feature of sustainable development is the widening of its interpretation to include social and economic issues in addition to the initial reference only to environmental protection. A detailed knowledge of the definition of the concept, its correct interpretation and the connection with the generic term, that is, regional development, enable its practical use in many areas, not only by public institutions, but also by businesses.

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