

Reviews – Polemics

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CZYNNIKI ZRÓWNOWAŻONEGO ROZWOJU REGIONÓW
NA PRZYKŁADZIE WOJEWÓDZTWA MAZOWIECKIEGO
I PODLASKIEGO
(FACTORS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONS
ON THE EXAMPLE OF MAZOWIECKIE AND PODLASKIE
VOIVODSHIPS)

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The reviewed study concerns a very important, current issue, and namely defining the most important determinants of sustainable development of spatial and economic units, such as voivodships, districts or municipalities. Therefore, raising the subject of the monograph by the authors should be evaluated positively.

The paper begins with an introduction in which the authors justify the choice of topic. They show the significance of sustainable development, considering the ecological, economic, social, and political components. They also refer to sustainable development of regions and discuss its determinants. They justify why they analyzed two neighboring voivodships, Mazowieckie and Podlaskie, indicating that they were guided by their significant differentiation in the level of development.

In the first chapter, the authors present the research problem, the main goal, and specific goals, as well as research hypotheses and methodology. As a research problem, they assumed the determination of factors influencing sustainable development of units. As already mentioned, this issue is important and topical. The main goal was to identify and evaluate factors supporting and limiting sustainable development of two regions at the NUTS 2 level. The authors defined the territorial scope of the research, i.e., two voivodships: Mazowieckie and Podlaskie. As detailed objectives, the authors considered the identification of the level of development of voivodships, districts, and municipalities in terms of economic, social, and environmental issues, making a diagnosis of the state of sustainable development, changes in this area, determination of opportunities and barriers to this development, as well as understanding the mechanisms of its support at the level of voivodships, districts, and municipalities. According to the authors the results of the research involved deepening knowledge in the studied area, especially about the determinants of sustainable development at various territorial levels and the definition of aggregate measures of the development indicators.

The authors put forward three research hypotheses that are both interesting and important, even though they raise some doubts and provoke questions. For example, according to the first hypothesis that spatial differentiation of economic, social, and natural conditions determines the synthetic indicators for particular orders, which is the reason for the diversified way of striving for sustainable development of the studied regions. The statement is obvious when the basis for these indicators is indicators related to the economy, society, and the environment. In the second hypothesis, the authors made an assumption that the degree of use of local potential affects sustainable development of regions. The third hypothesis, simplifying it, indicates that better use of the EU funds improves sustainable development of regions. In general, it can be stated that the direction of the formulated hypotheses is correct.

The research methodology includes, *inter alia*, justification for the selection of voivodships, data sources, and methods used in the analysis, largely with the use of modern quantitative methods. The authors presented in detail indicators used to determine the economic, social, and environmental situation at the level of voivodships, districts, and municipalities. The indicators can be deemed correct. The research covers the period of 2006-2016, i.e., after Poland's accession to the EU, and comes from mass statistics (Statistics Poland). The research period can be considered sufficient. The authors also conducted research (interviews) among employees of municipalities (173 from the Mazowieckie Voivodship and 91 from the Podlaskie Voivodship).

In the second chapter, the authors presented the evolution of the theory of sustainable development and its concept. They discussed this development as a “new paradigm”, pointing to more important views in this regard. They also reviewed literature on sustainable development, and then discussed the understanding of the concept of regions and the factors behind their development. They presented theories about the development of regions, including the theory of location, economic base, central centers, poles, or territorial social systems. They discussed sustainable development strategies for the Mazowieckie Voivodship and the same for the Podlaskie Voivod-

ship. They compared the adopted development goals, which are slightly different. They classified resources, values, and factors of local development, but also presented its barriers. At the end, they presented legal aspects of sustainable development in Poland and the European Union. In general, it can be said that the chapter has been prepared correctly, it shows a good knowledge of the authors about theories and legal regulations concerning sustainable regional development.

In the third chapter, the authors presented the development potential of the studied voivodships. They presented the structure of voivodships, including the division into NUTS units, the level of GDP, voivodship budgets, and more important indicators of production, investment, and demography. They devoted some space to budget of municipalities and their own income, divided into their types (rural, urban-rural, urban, with district status, and metropolises). The authors also evaluated spatial differentiation of economic, social, and natural conditions of municipalities located in the studied voivodships. They discussed in detail the economic differentiation of the studied voivodships and municipalities determined by the budgetary position, but also by social conditions (including migration). Based on the analysis, they stated that the spatial differentiation of the determinants of sustainable development speaks in favor of the Mazowieckie Voivodship. In conclusion, it can be said that the third chapter, which is a kind of introduction to fundamental research, is mainly informative, interesting, and comparative.

In the fourth chapter, the authors presented factors of sustainable development in the analyzed voivodships from 2004-2013. This chapter began with an indication of the level of financial resources obtained from regional operational programs in voivodships in total and per capita, in comparison with the country and other voivodships. In this part of the monograph, a valuable component concerns the development and attempt to use the indicator for the degree of sustainable development. The authors' approach is interesting and enriches the reviewed dissertation. To calculate this indicator at the voivodship level, the authors use 7 measures relating to the economy, 9 – society, and 12 – the environment. As for districts, these indicators are as follows: 7, 10 and 7, respectively, and in terms of municipalities these indicators are: 7, 7, and 9, respectively. . In my opinion, the indicators were selected correctly and they does not raise any concerns in substantive terms.

The next part of the study is an attempt to evaluate the directions of changes in the development of voivodships on a national scale. The authors apply a multidimensional comparative analysis, considering the economy, social and environmental indicators. Using a taxonomic measure of development, they argue that with respect to economy and society, the Mazowieckie Voivodship was in the lead, with Podlaskie placed clearly lower. It was similar in the case of sustainable development. The discussed part contains a lot of detailed calculations, with the use of various research methods (including the Hellwig model method), the division of municipalities into four development classes, including sustainable development, in a dynamic approach, in 2006, 2011, and 2016. The study is very rich in numbers and details that are a bit overwhelming. Due to the information overload, one can find it difficult to see the point of the calculations.

In chapter five, the authors presented the results of the research on the factors

behind sustainable development of municipalities in the opinion of their employees. They used an online questionnaire and received 173 and 91 opinions from the Mazowieckie and Podlaskie Voivodships. They found that the level of infrastructure development is lower in the Podlaskie Voivodship, which is a factor considered to be the most important for sustainable development. In both voivodships, respondents indicated that the most important goals are an increase in investments and the improvement of life quality of the inhabitants. The respondents also indicated opportunities and barriers, as well as development opportunities and threats to sustainable development of municipalities. It turned out that development barriers in both voivodships are similar, and namely a low level of entrepreneurship, poor situation on the labor market, and insufficient sources of financing for development. On the other hand, the indicated opportunities were different; in the Mazowieckie Voivodship: a high level of education and good condition of roads, and in the Podlaskie Voivodship: well-developed agriculture and cooperation of municipalities. The importance of rural tourism and agritourism was also pointed out. In general, it can be stated that the chapter is substantively and methodically correct. It provides interesting information on the opinions of municipal representatives, their assessment of strengths as well as development opportunities and threats, especially in the context of sustainable development.

The monograph ends with a summary and conclusions. First, the authors refer to the hypotheses. They state that all (three) have been positively verified. There are as many as nine conclusions, and they also vary in weight. Among them, the most valuable is the statement that the impact of local development centers, such as: Ostrołęka, Siedlce, Radom, Łomża or Suwałki (former capital cities of voivodships), is smaller than could be expected, as it is limited only to the surrounding municipalities. It also seems important to say that the level of economic development determines social and environmental development. Another interesting finding is that the disproportions in regional development are caused by the concentration of growth in geographic centers and an indication of the need for abandoning the equalization policy in favor of supporting well-prepared investments that trigger development stimuli. Another interesting statement, the most far-reaching, concerns the remark that the European Union funds distribution system requires some changes.

Having analyzed the monograph, it can be concluded that the results of the authors' inquiries presented in the summary and conclusions are interesting, generally correct, and relate to the hypotheses. In general, it can be said that the authors captured the key results and conclusions of the research quite well.

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