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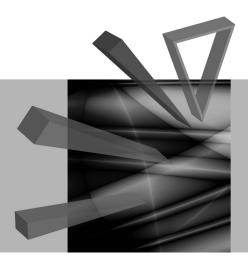
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THE CONCEPT OF REGIONAL STRATEGY OF SMART SPECIALIZATION

Summary: The aim of the paper is to present the specificity of the concept of smart specialization, its strengths and weaknesses, as well as examples of its successful use in the development of selected regions. The study has been based mainly on literature surveys and the analysis of documents, including the RIS3 guide presenting the mechanism of the development of regional smart specialization strategy.

Keywords: smart specialization, regional development, European Union.

1. Introduction

Significant social and economic changes taking place in recent years in the global economy have forced a reorientation of community policy. Emphasis has been placed on strengthening the innovation and competitiveness of the European economy. The new philosophy of the European policy stresses the need to accelerate and strengthen the development of a knowledge-based economy, contribute to the efficient use of resources and strengthen the innovation capacity of regions [Nowakowska 2009, p. 7].

The regional development policy after 2013, attributes key importance to the strategy *Europe 2020*. It sets three ambitious interrelated goals for the whole Union: smart development (stimulated by the development of an economy based on knowledge and innovation), sustainable development and also inclusive development [Harańczyk 2011, p. 7]. The objectives outlined above should also be transferred onto a regional level in all EU member states.

The new model of EU regional policy for the programming period after 2013, is based on the premise that development chances are inherent in all types of regions, where development determinants are located in different territorial systems. Thus, the aim of regional intervention is to maximize growth at national level by supporting and encouraging each region to present, strengthen and use its

endogenous growth potential with the help of internal or external resources [Harańczyk 2011, p. 7].

In the context of convergence and cohesion among the European regions, the promotion of innovation in regions that are in different phases of development has been a central objective of European regional policy. For this purpose, the European Commission has launched many innovation schemes and many European regions have conducted initiatives of this kind [Kyrgiafini, Sefertzi 2008, pp. 885–910]. The most popular is smart specialization.

New concepts of territorially-oriented development and the analysis of the effectiveness of existing regional innovation strategies, have prompted the European Commission to propose a new approach to regional innovation policy – the so-called smart specialization strategy. The concept of smart specialization assumes, primarily, the increase of innovation and competitiveness based on regions' endogenous potentials in industries already present in them, which may involve specializations within a single sector as well as cross-sectoral activities allowing the achievement of a specific competitive advantage [Gaczek, Matusiak 2011, pp. 7–8].

In this context, the aim of the paper is to present the specifics of the concept of smart specialization, its strengths and weaknesses, as well as examples of its successful use in the development of selected regions. The study has been based mainly on literature surveys and analysis of documents, including the RIS3 guide [Foray et al. 2012, p. 12] presenting the mechanism of development of regional smart specialization strategy.

2. Regional innovation policy

The regional scale is commonly considered appropriate for implementing policies related to innovation. In a knowledge-based economy, the region turns out to be one of the key levels for stimulating innovative entrepreneurship. Regions constitute a level at which better use is made of the endogenous resources available in a given space [Matusiak 2010].

The regional scale is currently used both in the theoretical analysis and in the operationalization of policies to encourage innovation. Fritsch and Stephan presented several reasons for the regionalization of innovation policies [Pinto, Rodrigues 2010, pp. 1732–1733]:

- innovation processes are not distributed equally in space, but are concentrated in some regions and are almost absent in others. National policies have a regional impact, and these differences justify per se a regionalized guidance to achieve national targets more effectively;
- there are differences not only in the proportion of innovative activity, but also in how innovation systems operate. Policies based on the replication of good

practices do not work in all regions, and different instruments need to be adjusted to achieve a goal;

 although innovation is central to economic growth, regional development policies may conflict with national growth ambitions.

A fundamental role in the process of building regions' innovation capacity is played by regional policy constituting a platform for joining the different actors on the regional innovation scene. Local authorities in this process have mainly the function of supporting and coordinating innovation-oriented measures and activities in the region. Regional innovation policy can be defined as a set of rules, methods and tools by which regional policy actors stimulate innovation processes. This is a set of decisions and actions taken by the regional authorities with the aim to strengthen broadly understood innovation processes taking place in the region. In other words, it is a purposeful activity of regional authorities, undertaken to promote regional economic innovation and build an effective regional innovation system [Nowakowska 2010, p. 36].

The main tool for shaping innovation policy at regional level is Regional Innovation Strategy. Regional Innovation Strategies (RISs) play a significant role in developing competitive regional economies. They are aimed at the building of a permanent regional partnership between scientific centres and industry and at the enhanced competitiveness of SMEs through the introduction of new technologies and raising the level of qualifications of scientific staff and enterprises as regards the carrying out and managing of R&D studies and the commercialization of their results [Strategy for Increasing the Innovativeness... 2006, p. 42].

An important challenge for the region for the new 2014–2020 programming perspective is, therefore, to meet the requirements of the EU and to prepare development strategies taking into account the smart specialization. The European Commission expects national and regional authorities across Europe to develop research and innovation strategies for the smart specialization in order to allow the use of EU structural funds in a more efficient manner and increase synergies between different EU, national and regional policies, as well as public and private investments [Strategie badawcze i innowacyjne... 2012].

3. The concept of smart specialization

Smart specialisation is a policy concept that was elaborated in 2008 by a group of academics, namely Foray, David and Hall [Foray, David, Hall 2009; Foray 2011]. Although the idea is more a policy-oriented notion than a well-documented academic theory, it heavily influences European decision makers, especially in a crisis situation and within R&D financial constraints [Rogut, Piasecki 2012, p. 4].

According to its authors, the smart specialization idea is based on an entrepreneurial process of discovery which is a learning process with the aim to

find out the research and innovation domains in which a region can hope to excel [Foray, David, Hall 2009]. The leading role in the process is played by – in a broad sense – entrepreneurial actors (firms, higher education institutions, independent inventors and innovators) discovering promising future specializations. Foray noticed that these actors "are in the best position to discover the domains of R&D and innovation in which a region is likely to excel given its existing capabilities and productive assets" [Foray 2011]. He also posits that innovations do not have to be purely technical. This fact was also emphasised by other researchers. As noted by McCann and Ortega-Argilés, the transition from technological innovation to organizational and social, gives for all the regions a chance of building strong position niches, in which they demonstrate a competitive or comparative advantage [McCann, Ortega-Argilés 2011]. As posited by Foray et al. [2012, p.1 2].: "the smart specialisation concept therefore promotes efficient, effective and synergetic use of public investments and supports countries and regions in strengthening their innovation capacity, while focusing scarce human and financial resources in a few globally competitive areas in order to boost economic growth and prosperity".

The idea of smart specialisation is now a key part of the EU innovation plan [Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative Innovation Union... 2010]. The European Commission has prepared a platform of services (S3) to endorse regions and countries in their efforts to devise and implement a smart specialisation strategy. Moreover, implementing the smart specialisation is a conditionality clause for structural fund attribution [Foray 2011].

Following the authors of the *Guide to Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS 3)*, smart specialization is "smart" for two reasons (see Figure 1) [Foray et al. 2012, pp. 16–17].

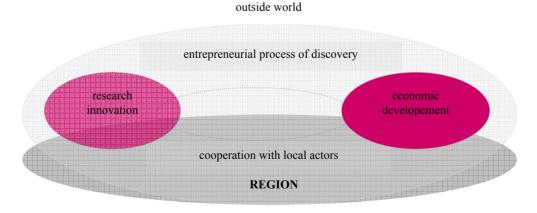


Figure 1. The visualisation of the smart specialization concept

Source: own elaboration.

Firstly, it associates research and innovation with economic development in new ways, such as the entrepreneurial process of discovery and the setting of priorities by policy makers in close cooperation with local actors. Secondly, this process is carried out with an eye on the outside world, forcing regions to be ambitious but realistic about what can be achieved, while linking local assets and capabilities to external sources of knowledge and value chains.

Although there may be identified common features in the process of devising regional strategies, understanding the local context will add to the document's distinctive character.

As noted by Foray, David, Hall [2009], a framework clarifying the logic of the smart specialisation is shaped by *General Purpose Technologies* (GPTs), whose characteristics are "horizontal propagation throughout the economy and complementarity between invention and application development" [Foray, David, Hall 2009, p. 27]. According to the authors of this article, the most important feature is their transformative potential and horizontal nature. In the European Commission's *Guide to Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS 3)*, these technologies are defined as KET (Key Enabling Technologies) [Foray et al. 2012, p. 14].

Regions can benefit from these technologies in different ways. The leader regions could invest in the inventions of a KET, follower regions are advised to invest in the *co-invention of applications* – that is – the development of the applications of a KET in one or several important domains of the regional economy [Foray, David, Hall 2009].

Promising as it is, the smart specialisation seems to also have its weaknesses. The authors of this article share D. Foray's opinion that this strategy does not necessarily offer any protection against the risks of collective inertia and the inability to respond to the challenges of a radical innovation that threatens to render the capacities of a particular region obsolescent. Enterprises may even tend to respond to the new challenge by placing even more confidence in the organisation routines of the past, a phenomenon that Sull designated "active inertias" and finally they could go bankrupt [Foray 2009, p. 23]. An example of this situation could be tyre companies in the United States of America who were heavily striving to improve incrementally their obsolete technologies as a response to the technological challenge posed by Michellin [Foray 2009, p. 23].

Nevertheless, the possible advantages of using the smart specialisation strategy seem to outweigh the disadvantages of not applying it to regional development. Some positive examples are presented in the next section of the paper.

4. Positive examples of implementing regional smart specialization strategy

In the existing published works on smart specialisation, there can be found positive examples of its usage. Following smart specialisation strategy, the regional change

may be put in motion in four ways, namely: transition, modernisation, diversification and radical change. Well-documented examples of these four types of structural change may be found in the Commission's *Guide to Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization (RIS 3)* [Foray et al. 2012, p. 14].

For the transition process, understood as moving "from an existing sector to a new one based on cooperative institutions and processes" [Foray et al. 2012, p. 14], the given example is of Austrian entrepreneurs who discovered a transition path from fine mechanical and optical engineering to medical technologies. In this way, the initial set of inventions in medical technologies emerged from the industrial capabilities and competences which were already strong in mechanical engineering.

Modernisation, defined as "the technological upgrading of an existing industry, involving the development of specific applications of a Key Enabling Technology to improve efficiency and quality in an existing (perhaps traditional) sector" [Foray et al. 2012, p. 14] is presented in the light of the Finnish pulp and paper industry viewing nanotechnology as a promising source of valuable applications. Foray cites also the examples such as ICT applications in the fishing industry or the application of nanotechnologies within the agro-food sector [Foray 2011, p. 6]. He also emphasises that the intersection between the potential of a GPT application to "modernise" a given sector of the regional economy defines the feasibility space for the smart specialisation strategy to be undertaken [Foray 2011, p. 6].

Diversification, specified as the process of discovery concerning "potential synergies (economies of scope and spillovers) which are likely to materialise between an existing activity and a new one" [Foray et al. 2012, p. 14] is exemplified by the region of Toulouse which exhibits smart specialisation in aeronautics. This activity led to an extension of entrepreneurial activities and higher education and research infrastructure to new areas such as satellites and GPS Technologies.

Finally, radical change or a radical foundation of a new domain comes in a situation where innovation in a certain field making previously low growth activities suddenly becomes attractive [Foray et al. 2012, p. 15]. For example, the development of IT applications for the management and maintenance of the archaeological and historical heritage in Italy (Florence).

Apart from the examples listed above, the authors also recommend scrutinising the following initiatives:

- Top Technology Region (TTR), Skane's innovation capacity in the scope of regional potential analysis for innovation;
- Modern Navara in the scope of ensuring participation;
- The West Midlands Innovation Strategy in the scope of public–private cooperation;
- Vlaanderen in Actie in the scope of vision building;
- RITTS Project Berlin in the scope of regional priority setting;

 The Innovation Assessment Methodology Lower Austria in the scope of monitoring and evaluation.

The experiences drawn from the initiatives mentioned above could significantly enrich the methodology of smart specialisation strategy building.

5. Summing-up

Smart specialization means the identification of unique features and assets of each country and region, highlighting their competitive advantages and clustering regional partners and the resources around a specific vision of the future.

According to Kardas, the objective of implementing the concept of smart specialization into regional development, is the optimum use of the potential of individual regions and countries through adjusting, in the best way, the science and education development directions of these regions or countries to their specific socio-economic conditions, which means the appropriate compilation of the triangle: science – education – economy. This means, e.g. directing public interventions towards such initiatives, activities and projects that will enable the specialization of a given region or state, either in the development of basic technologies (in the case of regions most advanced in terms of technology and development), or in the development of products and services using these technologies (in the case of less developed regions) [Kardas 2011, pp. 125–129].

A special role in the development of smart specialization strategies is assigned to public authorities. It should be noted, however, that smart specialization should not be determined arbitrarily by the public administration within its development plans compiled. Instead, it should be an "entrepreneurial" learning process indicating in which science or technology of a given region could become a leader on the European and global scale [Kardas 2011, p. 127]. The development of smart specialization strategies is, therefore, a challenge to be met in the near future also by Polish regions willing to make use of the EU funds in the period of 2014–2020.

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KONCEPCJA REGIONALNEJ STRATEGII INTELIGENTNEJ SPECJALIZACJI

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie specyfiki inteligentnej specjalizacji, jej silnych i słabych stron, jak również przykładów jej wykorzystania w rozwoju wybranych regionów. Opracowanie bazuje na studiach literatury i analizie dokumentów, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem przewodnika opracowania regionalnych strategii inteligentnych specjalizacji RIS, przygotowanego przez Komisję Europejską.

Slowa kluczowe: inteligentna specjalizacja, rozwój regionalny, Unia Europejska.