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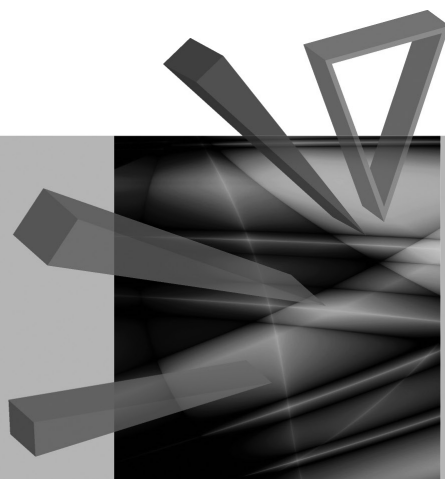
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# **Regional Economy in Theory and Practice**



edited by

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## **RESILIENCE, COMPETITIVENESS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES\***

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**Summary:** The most commonly mentioned concepts related to regional development are the competitiveness of the region, sustainable development and regional resilience. The aim of the article is a comparative analysis of the definitions, goals and determinants of these three concepts and an attempt to indicate the similarities and differences among them.

**Keywords:** region, competitiveness, resilience, sustainable development.

### **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, the most frequently mentioned concepts related to regional development remain the competitiveness of the region, sustainable development and regional resilience. A consensus regarding these three concepts does not exist – some authors argue that the pursuit to improve competitiveness excludes sustainable development, others do not share this opinion. In the case of resilience, some scientists believe that competitiveness (in the most common approach) may influence resilience negatively, whereas others maintain that these two ideas are strictly connected. This article is an attempt to analyse the chosen definitions and foundations to find similarities and differences among these concepts.

### **2. Regional competitiveness**

Competitiveness is defined as a propriety of a business, a region or a country to achieve efficacious contest, success and permanent development by, among others, the effective use of its own resources. Definitions of competitiveness vary with regard to the level considered. Regional competitiveness and competitive regions are defined as follows:

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\* The article was written within the framework of the project: “Baltic Economic Observatory”.

1. M.E. Porter does not refer to regional level in his definitions of competitiveness, however his considerations are used to explain competitiveness at regional level [Gawlikowska-Hueckel 2008, p. 41]. According to Porter, competitiveness is strictly related to productivity. “The principal goal of a nation is to produce a high and rising standard of living for its citizens. The ability to do so depends on the productivity with which the nation’s labor and capital are employed” [Porter 2008, p. 176], Porter assumes that a competitive advantage depends on the ability to create knowledge, innovations and the capacity to upgrade [p. 171].

2. H. Godlewska mentions three ways of defining regional competitiveness: as a group of features determining its attractiveness, as an indirect and direct rivalry between regions and as a capacity of a region to absorb businesses, capital, new technologies etc. [Godlewska 2001, p. 27].

3. The European Commission describes regional competitiveness as the capacity to create and produce goods, maintain a high level of income and generate a high employment level [Gardiner, Martin, Tyler 2004, p. 1047].

4. Competitiveness “is the ability of a region to foster, attract and support economic activity so that its citizens enjoy relatively good economic welfare” [Houvari, Kangasharju, Alanen 2001, p. 1].

5. According to R. Huggins and W. Davies, competitive regions are able to anticipate and adapt to various challenges [Lambregts, Janssen-Jansen, Haran 2008, p. 45].

6. A region is competitive if it is able to create, adequately to the conditions, structural combinations by using its resources [Klamut 2008, p. 50].

A comparison of these and other definitions of regional competitiveness make it possible to determine notions related to it, namely productivity and economic growth, standards of living and quality of life (or welfare), adaptability, use of region’s resources (or its strengths), attractiveness (for business, citizens etc.), creating an environment for entrepreneurship and the capacity of the region to absorb the necessary resources from outside (capital, knowledge, technology etc.).

### **3. Resilience and resilient regions**

Recently the idea of resilience has been mentioned and described more frequently. These two terms – resilience and competitiveness – are often put together. The notion of resilience originates from ecological sciences and (in such an approach) means the bio-capacity of organisms to adapt and develop under disadvantageous conditions or, in the case of ecosystems, has a similar meaning to their stability or elasticity [Vatn 2005, p. 118; Brand 2009, p. 606; Christopherson, Michie, Tyler 2010, p. 3]. The idea of resilience has been adapted by social sciences, including economics, however in that case it is described as a capacity to return to a narrow, strictly determined equilibrium state. The resilience of the regions is commonly re-



lated to their adaptability [Christopherson, Michie, Tyler 2010, p. 3]. Regional resilience and resilient regions have been defined several times, for instance:

1. According to K.A. Foster “regional resilience as the ability of a region to anticipate, prepare to respond and recover from disturbance” [Foster 2006, p. 14].

2. Resilience may be related to the region’s ability to return to its pre-shock position including the level of production or employment [Dawley, Pike, Tomaney 2010, p. 653].

3. Regional resilience is “the ability of a region [...] to recover successfully from shocks to its economy that either throw it off its growth path or have the potential to throw it off its growth path but do not actually do so” [Hill, Wial, Wolman 2008, pp. 4–5].

4. In the case of a resilient region, its economic and political structures have the ability of continual adaptation to changing conditions and, if the process fails, the region maintains its ability to re-organise its structure [Swanstrom 2008, p. 10].

5. S. Christopherson, J. Michie and P. Tyler emphasize that a resilient region maintains long-term economic success (in spite of economic changes) that may be measured by quality of life, standards of living, employment rate and economic growth [Christopherson, Michie, Tyler 2010, p. 6].

6. A resilient region anticipates and prepares for changes, has the capability for learning and securing resources to use them in the process of outlasting shocks [Hudson 2010, p. 22].

Generally speaking, resilience is a dynamic, long-term process (with regard to continuous changes) related to the adaptation of the region (treated as a system) to various disturbances. Some authors define it as a capacity of the system to recover after shock (back to the previous equilibrium or move to a new one) or get through such a disruption and retain (or regain) the ability of regular functioning [Simmie, Martin 2010, p. 28; Swanstrom, Chapple, Immergluck 2009, p. 3; Hudson 2010, p. 12].

A strict relationship between the resilience of the regions, their adaptability, transformability, vulnerability or resistance to shocks, stability, possibility of reorganisation and economic development, growth path, welfare and standards of living is emphasised. Moreover, resilience and its foundations are also related to innovation, creating and spreading new knowledge, competitive processes, economic growth and success, market changes and employment rate.

Resilience is also connected with the foundations of sustainable development that involve not only socio-economic questions but also ecological ones,<sup>1</sup> namely eco-efficiency, environmentally less damaging production (consumption) and taking into consideration ecological limits [Bristow 2010, p. 153; Hudson 2010, pp. 12, 22].

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<sup>1</sup> The idea of a region as a socio-ecological system.

#### 4. Sustainable development of the region

The term sustainable development has two parts: the word “sustainable” originated from ecological sciences and means the ability of an ecosystem to persist in an almost unchanged state, whereas the word “development” derives from social and economic sciences. Such an approach unites ecological and economic interests [Jarabeen 2008, pp. 181–182]. Sustainable development has been defined and re-defined many times [e.g. Piontek 2002, pp. 15–27], like competitiveness and resilience, however in the case of the concept, the differentiation of definitions among three levels (micro-, mezo- and macroeconomic) practically does not exist. The most respected definition of sustainable development was introduced in The World Commission on the Environment and Development Report in 1987. According to the report, “sustainable development meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [after: Keiner 2004, pp. 379–380].

Three dimensions of sustainability are differentiated – social, economic and ecological – they are equal, so none of them should be treated as superior [e.g. Ciechanowicz-McLean 2003, p. 38; Keiner 2004, pp. 380–381].

As already mentioned, sustainable development is defined in a general way, nevertheless some authors refer the concept to a specific level, including a regional one. According to M.L.M. Graymore, “regional sustainability requires the human population to live within the limits of the region's supporting systems (social, economic and ecosystem), ensuring equitable sharing of resources and opportunities for this and future generations in the region” [Graymore, Sipe, Rickson 2008, pp. 362–363].

Sustainable development is related to the ecologisation of the economy (“greening”), a permanent improvement in the quality of life, intra and intergenerational justice, social participation, limitation of harmful environmental impact, protection of biodiversity and spatial planning<sup>2</sup> as a part of long-time economic development.

#### 5. Similarities and differences between the described concepts

A comparison of these three described concepts demonstrates that competitiveness is proprietary, while resilience is a process or (very seldom) propriety and sustainable development – a goal to reach or a constant process.

The essence of competitiveness is the capacity for such socio-economic development that provides welfare to citizens; the substance of resilience is the ability of a regional economy to survive shocks and recover from them and in the case of sustainable development – it is balancing social, economic and ecological policy [Kruk, Waldziński 2010, p. 94].

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<sup>2</sup> Proper management of the living space for present and future generations.

Analysing the definitions and foundations of these three concepts allows to differentiate between the main elements (Table 1). The following denotations were used in the description:

- + strong relationship between a chosen concept and notion exists,
- relationship does not occur,
- ? relationship is unclear or only indirect.

**Table 1.** Concept of competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of the region

Categories	Regional		
	competitiveness	resilience	sustainability
Quality of life/standards of living/welfare	+	+	+
Economic growth (development)	+	+	?
Productivity	+	?	–
Innovations, knowledge creation and spreading	+	+	?
Employment rate	+	+	?
Adaptability to changes	+	+	–
Use of regional resources	+	+	?
Fulfilling the needs	+	+	+
Social justice	–	–	+
Living within environmental limits	–	–	+
Nature protection and preservation	–	–	+
Policy of local and regional authorities	+	+	+

Source: own elaboration.

In all these concepts references to the quality of life, standards of living or welfare are included and they are treated as superior. It is the first element shared by all of them. The situation is not so clear in the case of economic growth (or development). For competitiveness or resilience, increasing the growth (or, at least, maintaining it at a stable level) is crucial, however referring to a sustainable development relationship is not so obvious. The pursuit of growth based on unconditional production and consumption increase denies the aims of such development [Rogall 2010, p.158]. In this instance the question of an alternative path of development related to a change in the system of values are required (“to produce less, to consume less but produce something else” or “to produce more or the same but to consume less”). This means economic development based on completely different presumptions [Ginsbert-Gebert 1990, pp. 22–25]. A shift of the basic foundation is possible as well, not raising the production continuously but aspiring to the so-called steady state economy [Rogall 2010, p. 162]. Some authors follow the idea of sustainable growth, leading, for example, to increasing competitiveness [e.g. Balkytė, Tvaronavičienė 2010, pp. 356–357].

Productivity is strongly highlighted in the concept of competitiveness – according to M.E. Porter – it is a fundamental factor influencing living standards in

a country or region [Porter 2008, p. 176]. Productivity is also combined with resilience, however seldom. Usually it is used with a description of weak or strong resilience performance [e.g. Foster 2006, p. 26]. The term is not mentioned in the case of sustainable development.

Innovations (and the creation of knowledge) are named as one of the fundamental factors of competitiveness and resilience. Indirectly, a connection exists between them and sustainability in the case of eco-innovations. M.E Porter and C. van der Linde assert that the thrifty, reasonable use of natural resources, a reduction of the negative environmental impact and an improvement of eco-efficiency owing to eco-innovations determine competitiveness [Porter, van der Linde 1995, pp. 120–122, 133–134].

Where employment is concerned, its relatively high rate is one of competitiveness and resilience determinants as well, however this is not mentioned in the third concept. Taking into consideration salaries and other work benefits (e.g. satisfaction, social stabilisation), it may be regarded as an element of life quality also in the case of sustainable development.

Adaptability is crucial both for resilience and competitiveness. The capacity to recover after shocks is important for regional development in the two mentioned concepts. However the term is not connected with sustainability.

In ideas of competitiveness and resilience, using the region's own resources is emphasized as well. Such an aim is consistent with the theory of endogenous regional development. It is not directly related to sustainability, nevertheless some authors remark that such a development based on their own resources, is more "green" and less environmentally harmful with regard to the limitation of food and other goods' transport sometimes from distant parts of the globe [Hudson 2010, p. 15].

Fulfilling human needs is also connected with the quality of life, welfare and productivity and is fundamental to all three concepts. Regarding sustainability, the question is examined with reference to present and future generations.

However, some questions are only a part of sustainable development, namely nature protection and preserving biodiversity, life within environmental limits and social justice.

Another common element shared by these three concepts is the policy of local and regional authorities, essentially influencing the socio-economic situation in regions, the possibility of implementing all of them and reaching the required aims.

## 6. Conclusions

An analysis of the above mentioned concepts allows to formulate the following conclusion that there exist greater similarities between regional competitiveness and resilience than between them and sustainability. Some authors emphasize the close relationship between resilience and competitiveness and the fact that regional adaptability to external and internal changes (shocks) is common to both of them.

There are some similarities in all three concepts, namely the aim to improve the quality of life and standards of living, meeting needs, and the dependence on policy of local and regional authorities. Both in the case of competitiveness, resilience and sustainable development, long-term performance is fundamental (especially for the last concept).

Some authors treat all three ideas as mutually supplementary. Nevertheless, this question needs further study.

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## REZYLIENCJA, KONKURENCYJNOŚĆ I ROZWÓJ ZRÓWNOWAŻONY REGIONÓW – PODOBIENSTWA I RÓŻNICE

**Streszczenie:** Współcześnie do najczęściej spotykanych koncepcji powiązanych z teorią rozwoju regionalnego można zaliczyć: konkurencyjność regionów, rozwój zrównoważony oraz rezyliencję regionów (tj. zdolność do adaptacji do zachodzących zmian, umiejętność radzenia sobie z pojawiającymi się trudnościami). Celem artykułu jest analiza porównawcza definicji, celów i czynników determinujących te trzy koncepcje oraz próba znalezienia podobieństw i różnic między nimi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** region, konkurencyjność, rezyliencja, rozwój zrównoważony.