

# Abstract

**European Union Funds as a Factor of Regional Development.** The problem of implementation of funds from European Union programmes cannot be ignored in deliberations on the regional development in Poland. Due to a considerable level of their absorption and their diversified structure, the funds are currently the most important factor in the socio-economic development of the country. They imply a lot of significant research and application problems, usually solved ‘sectorally’, in a traditional manner, where particular European policies and programmes are treated separately. This book is an attempt at a comprehensive presentation of the impact of European funds – one that complies with the *National Spatial Development Concept 2030 (NSDC 2030, or Polish: KPZK 2030)*, which posits that objectives of the spatial policy be co-dependent with objectives of the regional policy, thus combining strategic planning with programming of measures within development programmes and operational programmes co-financed from EU funds. The book is also an attempt to respond to the need for transition from the sectoral approach to the integrated territorial approach in order to increase the utilisation of endogenous territorial potentials.

The publication presents a spatial analysis of patterns in implementation of funds acquired within particular programmes of the Cohesion Policy, Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy. It includes the results of nation-wide studies conducted by the Department of Spatial Planning and Tourism in the Faculty of Earth Sciences and Spatial Management at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

The book also proposes a synthetic description of the quantitative scope, structure and spatial patterns of the influx of the financial capital, *i.e.* payments from EU aid programmes, to Polish regions. Its seven chapters describe objectives, localities and results of the disbursement of 483.4 bn PLN obtained from EU programmes in the financial perspective of 2007–2013. Besides the spatial analysis, the objective of the work is also to assess the impact of those funds on specific elements of the territorial capital of Polish regions. Furthermore, it suggests how much an increase in the territorial capital assigned to EU programmes contributes to a decrease in development

disparities on different spatial scales: between Poland and other EU Member States, between western and eastern regions of Poland, and between regional centres and peripheries.

The contemporary theory of regional development and regional development policy imply that human and social capital are particularly important components of territorial capital. Some EU aid programmes were fully (Human Capital OP) or partially (Rural Development Programme, regional operational programmes) dedicated to building human and social capital. From the description of these measures it can be concluded that funds from EU programmes contributed to the development of social and human capital, for instance, through aid for education or for professional development, through support provided to young and active farmers and through stimulation of local communities. To a large extent, these measures were implemented in rural areas. Both the support from EU programmes and the analysis of their effectiveness concentrate on the external and measurable characteristics of population and organisation. Therefore, it cannot be stated if and how EU measures contributed to changes in civic attitudes, trust and long-term engagement.

Also direct payments within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) had a non-negligible impact on the formation of the human capital in rural areas. CAP was a vital source of payments from EU programmes, only second to Infrastructure and Environment OP. Unlike funds from other programmes, CAP funds were granted unconditionally, being egalitarian in nature. That is why – as funds for social, not investment, purposes – they are often disregarded in the discourse on the development impact of European Union policies. However, these funds substantially improved life standard in rural areas, raising incomes of agricultural households and bringing effects synergistic with funds for enterprises, organisations and social and technical infrastructure in rural areas coming from the implementation of other programmes.

Most of funds from EU aid programmes in 2007–2013 perspective were allocated for enhancement of the physical capital of Polish regions. These funds came from Infrastructure and Environment OP and were dedicated to development of technical infrastructure (mainly transport infrastructure) and protection of natural resources; moreover, a considerable part of funds from other nationwide and regional operational programmes as well as funds from the Rural Development Programme were assigned to improvement of agrarian conditions and equipment. European funds for conservation and protection of national natural resources are of two kinds. Some, for example supporting measures for sustainable farming and afforestation, were primarily dedicated to thinly-populated peripheral areas of the country. Others, aiming at minimisation of burdensome municipal waste and industry, were mostly granted to towns and cities. Funds for agricultural ventures were pretty evenly distributed across the country; not always, however, were they concentrated in places experiencing the most dire needs for restructuring of this sector. Neither was the support for infrastructure-related in-

vestment cumulated in regions which needed it the most. In this case, however, it was justified by the implementation of projects of transregional importance.

The quantitative analysis of the impact of aid funds from the European Union on economic growth in Poland and, by extension, on convergence of the Community development from the international perspective is infeasible. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Poland's achievement of the highest economic growth in the period of 2007–2013 among the EU Member States and the reduction of the difference between the national and European mean average of the GDP *per capita* from 47% to 33% (according to the Eurostat data) would not have been possible but for the influx of capital from EU aid programmes.

In the disbursement period (2007–2015) Poland saw a small, but clearly noticeable, growth in development disparities between regions and between regional centres and peripheries. However, these phenomena cannot be associated with the impact of the discussed funds; they are rather contingent on wider trends seen at the domestic and international levels, *e.g.* migration dynamics and an increase in the significance of innovative economy branches with specific location requirements and tendency to spatial concentration. Although some EU programmes were dedicated to development of agglomerations, other funds, *e.g.* within the Common Agricultural Policy or Human Capital OP, were to a large extent oriented towards peripheral areas. For the latter, the influx of capital mitigated negative effects of the spatial polarisation of development.

The funds from EU aid programmes planned within 2007–2013 financial perspective discussed in this work were spent by 2015. The next financial perspective of 2014–2020 has the end of the disbursement period scheduled for 2022. The total sum of funds coming to Poland within the Cohesion Policy, Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy is even bigger than in 2007–2013 perspective. The final analysis and impact assessment of the influx of this capital with regard to regional development will be possible only in five years. The next budget of the European Union, for years 2021–2026, will probably envisage smaller aid funds for Poland. It will be due to an improved economic position of Poland relative to other EU Member States and the separation of the UK from the Community, among other reasons. Priorities of development programmes are changing, too. The prospective decrease in the flow of aid funds from the European Union means that the state government and self-governments should play a relatively more important role in the shaping and financing of the regional policy. The analysis of regional impacts of EU aid programmes is essential for good planning of the regional policy in Poland.

**Keywords:** Cohesion Policy, Common Agricultural Policy, Common Fisheries Policy, convergence, European Union funds, factors of regional development, regional development.