

THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM AND THE CONDITIONS OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Paper focuses to relations between the public administration reform in Poland and the new conditions of regional development. From point of view of regional development in the new systemic conditions the following 6 problems are important: development priorities, inter-regional relations, development goals and their harmonisation, the region within state --the state within region, financing regional development and implementation and co-ordination of the regional development policy.

Key words: public administration reform, regional development policy, political space.

1. INTRODUCTION

Changes in the country's territorial system, the establishment of new local government levels and future integration with the European Union have created a new, complex and very demanding environment for socio-economic development. Voivodships - Polish regions - are in a special situation. Since 1 January 1999 voivodships are self-governing entities within which the state's spatial policy and regional development policies will be carried out. Through their regional/local government institutions voivodships will form these policies to the extent defined in legal provisions, which are now under preparation. The proposed regulations assume that voivodships will be able, in certain cases, to question the rationale for the government's proposals concerning activities and projects, which from their perspective, could have a negative impact on voivodships' development. The problems of regional development assume thus a new dimension. In the new systemic conditions, these issues have ceased to be only a reflection of the central government's interests and priorities.

The directions and mechanisms of regional development are becoming increasingly a matter of the relations and agreements between the central and regional/local governments. Regional development is also a matter of harmonising the plans of gminas - the basic local government entities - with plans prepared at other levels. In addition, the issue of co-ordinating activities of adjacent regions acquires a new dimension. It goes without saying that the above new-quality relations among various levels of the central and local administrations are directly linked with regional development financing issues.

The purpose of this article is to identify some selected problems relating to the formation of the regional development policy caused by the public administration reform under way. We present a thesis here that the key effect of the reform for the conditions of regional development is a new quality of the political space which is a plane of crashing interests of actors influencing the socio-economic phenomena and processes within voivodships-regions and other constituent spatial entities.

2. THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM AND THE NEW POLITICAL SPACE

Every social and economic process has specific spatial aspects. However, the influence of space on human and social behaviour is not the same and keeps changing. Approaches to the role of space in human behaviour have evolved over time with the role of the space factor more or less important.

Space is of interest to numerous disciplines. The most evident are political science, sociology and, naturally, geography (in the case of interest to us it is the broadly defined social geography). Generally, we can state that these disciplines are interested in spatial aspects of social and political phenomena. The concept of social morphology, which was once popular in sociology and later continued by the Chicago school of social ecology, emphasised space as a social category (Eyles 1990). Those approaches were frequently criticised by researchers who contested them as a too one-sided view emphasising the impact of spatial relations among various elements of the social system on social phenomena. Some sociologists' sceptical approach to space as a social category was a reaction to environmental determinists' one-sidedness, which simplified the reasons and mechanisms governing the functioning of social groups. This criticism is justified when focusing on space ignores the influence on human behaviour of, for example, dominant values in culture groups. It should be noted, however, that criticism covers also the structural and functional paradigm and positivist methodology in studies of spatial aspects of specific phenomena and processes. Hence, it seems justified to say that in the absence of one, universal thematic construction that would explain the ways in which social groups function in space, there is a need for an attempt to use approaches allowing the perception of social problems from one methodologically rigorous perspective which, however, does not narrow the scope of analysis but allows to see the full diversity of a certain problem and its conditions.

Space may be perceived as a *sui generis* empty frame in which certain processes or phenomena occur. In this case, these processes or phenomena occur, or emerge, without any relation to this space, which means they are not determined by it. Space may be, however, understood also as a distance between objects, or as spatial relations among phenomena. It is also possible to find some order of phenomena in processes in space. This systematic and orderly arrangement has usually a meaning corresponding to certain social order. Finally, space may be seen as a set of boundaries and barriers to actions. These different meanings and perceptions of space may be ordered in two definitions of space. According to the first one, space may be perceived as a frame within which objects are located and processes take place as well as certain phenomena emerges. Objects, phenomena and processes may be classified and analysed in the spatial context which in this case stands not for conditions but for a background, or some clarifying reference point. Space may be divided into segments which are ascribed some features depending on objects they characterise. Space is a certain reflection of reality, one of the possible dimensions in observing phenomena and a tool for their observation. According to the second definition, space should be seen through the features of its constituent objects. In this case, space becomes a scene for all kinds of events. In other words, space is defined through processes, which occur in it. It is not only a background, but also an agent. In this way, space becomes an instrument for explanations (Hamm, 1990).

Political space is one in which fundamental functions of administrative and political structures are exercised. It is shaped by a number of elements from various spheres of political life. These elements include institutional forms of public administration composed of the central and regional/local administrations, political parties and non-governmental organisations. They fill this space and constitute a framework within which various social groups can articulate and accomplish their interests and at the same time fill space with specific features and meanings. For the sake of analysing the functions of public administration, political space should be therefore understood as a complex set of characteristic features of the relations between political actors situated in a specific context. These relations create social phenomena. Political space in democratic countries is determined in the course of unrestrained and dynamic interactions among various public entities. Political space may be dominated by groups that do not succumb to social control and use censorship or other repressive methods of social control to accomplish their goals (Zarzycki 1997).

The public administration reform in Poland which begun in 1990 with the establishment of gmina governments was completed in 1999 by the creation of local governments at the powiat (county) and voivodship (regional) levels. Transformations in the structure of government were accompanied by changes in the country's territorial organisation as a result of which 308 rural and 65 urban powiats were created and the number of voivodships was reduced from 49 to 16. The formal establishment of local government structures does not mean the reform of the public administration sector has been completed. It is necessary to develop effective methods for the new levels of government, professionalise their staff, and work out new solutions, e.g. in the sphere of local government finance based on the experiences in the first months of the three local government levels. The public administration reform will be continued, however, in

conditions of a new quality (Grochowski, 1998). Besides the three local government levels, there are active national associations of gminas of various types, powiats, and voivodships. There are numerous NGO's that facilitate the cooperation among local governments and represents various local interests (special-purpose associations of gminas, organisations that associate professionals, e.g., gmina secretaries or treasurers). The creation of local government structures and organisations supporting their development and activities has resulted in the emergence of a separate space different from one dominated by the state represented by various administrations. The public administration reform, which is one of the dimensions in democratisation of political life and decentralisation of government, has therefore produced a political space of a new quality, which will determine the priorities and mechanisms of regional development. The new quality of political space is a result of its several descriptions. This space is characterised mainly by great diversity understood as numerousness of entities, which achieve their goals actively in it. This space is also diverse in terms of goals carried out by these entities. In this case, we should note the complex relations between the public and private sectors and various interest groups. In the new political space, it is possible to identify the emerging local interest groups. An important characteristic of the new political space is the revival of local patriotism which influences the consolidation of leaders' as well as local and regional communities' efforts focused on various undertakings. The new political space is also characterised by great dynamics of changes, which is a consequence of the game in which the players compete to be able to accomplish their own interests according to the rules of a democratic state, where various entities have a right to articulate and defend their interests. The new quality of political space is also determined by the introduction of market rules into the economy, and a new definition of the state's role in development processes (Grochowski, 1997). Decentralisation of power to the local level results in the disappearance of the state's organisational and redistribution role. Political space is becoming multi-dimensional. Besides the central administration, there are regional/local authorities. They assume various central functions and become responsible for those that directly satisfy regional and local communities' needs. NGO's that support local governments are a new component of political space, which contribute to its diversity and creation of a civil society. Institutionalisation of solutions, which are effects of the public administration reform, is an element of the mechanism that enables the impact of political space on social behaviours.

Finally, it should be stated that the development of political space can be measured with the organisational performance of its structures, the level of local autonomy, the nature of the relations between the central and regional/local authorities and the society's ability to hold the governments at various levels accountable for their actions. The degree to which political space is developed may be considered a measure of the state's democratisation.

3. SELECTED PROBLEMS OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A STATE UNDERGOING REFORMS

The regional development policy must consider problems relating to the transformations of the country's economy, to the continuing and planned changes in the land use policy and demographic changes, which has influence on migrations or the situation on the labour market. Authors of the regional policy face a fundamental question about the goals of this policy. Is it the redistribution, support for backward regions and thereby equalisation of differences resulting from economic growth, or stimulation of development in regions which are most effective in the use of resources available? This question is of critical importance to the future of regions and the whole country. Discussion of the basic regulations concerning regional development proves redistribution of regional policy functions has both keen supporters and opponents (Gilowska et al. 1998). It should be noted, without trying to judge who is right in this debate, that the public administration reform and formation of a new political space make the answer to the question "redistribution or support for development incentives" even more difficult. It may be assumed that the present stage of the public administration reform is not suitable for finding a responsible answer to this question and preparing a draft regional policy as well as indicating ways in which it should be implemented. This thesis is a result of identifying the following 6 problems of regional development in the new systemic conditions:

3.1. Problem 1: Development Priorities

In the new context of regional development, which results from the transformation of political space described above, it is possible that regional development priorities do not correspond to development directions preferred by the central government. The central government will be able to provide support for regional development programs (according to the government's proposals), if the goals defined in regions are consistent with the goals of the national policy made by the central government. It seems however, the government is not ready to present a coherent proposal for regional development priorities. The proposed law on the principles governing support for regional development indicates that "balancing of the country's spatial development and reducing disparities among regions" should be one of the goals of the regional development policy (Ustawa ... 1999). At the same time, however, regional development policy is treated as one that should simulate development processes on the scale of the whole national economy. Therefore, it is doubtful if the regional development policy may exercise the two roles, especially when the economy is under transformation (Gilowska et al 1999).

3.2. Problem 2: Inter-regional Relations

In the new political space regions compete on many planes. The competition refers also to access to public funds from various sources (e.g., special-purpose funds, EU

pre-membership funds). The development capacity of Polish regions is varied just like their attractiveness to investors. The newly created regions are becoming independent from many stages in terms of economic advancement or land use. We may state that some regions are bound to succeed while others will have to wait many years for the results of their activities. The new systemic conditions create an opportunity to work out relations among regions that, despite the competition, will be favourable to the regions or their fragments (areas near the border, cooperation of metropolitan cities in various regions). This issue requires, however, a lot of preparations, work as well as political and organisational efforts. Although there is a potential to form relations among regions without participation of the central government, such cooperation is still a matter of the future.

3.3. Problem 3: Development Goals and their Harmonisation

An issue to be resolved is who should decide about the ways of using space, who should formulate regional development policies and who should be responsible for the harmonisation of goals, methods and ways in which they are to be achieved. It is hard to overestimate the question of institutionalising planning procedures, especially when the development process occurs in a space composed of numerous entities, which have different goals. Institutions, which implement and support regional development, must have a clear and transparent internal structure to enable the monitoring and supervision of procedures used in decision-making. Currently, the situation is not quite clear and the government's proposals do not promise to change it (Ustawa ... 1999).

3.4. Problem 4: The Region within the State - The State within the Region

The creation of local governments at the voivodship level is a starting point for a situation in which regions bear the main responsibility for their development. In the Polish context it must be emphasised that, the creation of voivodship governments may be treated merely as a very initial starting point because decentralisation of responsibilities is still not accompanied by decentralisation of public finance. Thus, regions remain dependent on the national budget. Over the past several years, discussions of the regional policy have included the question of to what extent the state should interfere with this policy. The draft law on the principles governing support for regional development suggests representatives of the central government think their role in it should be quite significant and the state should interfere with this policy to a great extent (Ustawa ... 1999). This approach fails to notice the facts resulting from the organisation of political space, which means mainly that local/regional authorities have become independent entities and the state's role has been reduced in areas where the principle of subsidiarity should be observed. It is a separate question whether the legal provisions are really necessary to stimulate regional development. One can be under an impression that the specific Polish approach is that legislation regulates in detail everything that has not been regulated in this way yet.

3.5. Problem 5: Financing Regional Development

At the close of the decade of constructing local government structures in Poland, the public finance system has not been reformed yet. Consequently, the way of financing regional development is still unknown. It may be assumed that the next few years will be a time of "hibernation" for some regions or their parts.

3.6. Problem 6: Implementation and Co-ordination of the Regional Development Policy

This problem, although related to the goals and harmonisation (problem 3), is treated as separate. The regional development policy is to be implemented through the use of, e.g., a regional contract mechanism. This model seems attractive. It allows define precisely the obligations of each party to the contract. It makes it easier to monitor the progress of work and the way of funding becomes transparent. It should be noted, however, that the government's proposition that contracts be negotiated by local governments at the voivodship level with voivods (governors), might fragment space anew. However, the purpose of changing the territorial system was, among others, to create voivodships big enough to become regional policy-makers. Voivods will be able to negotiate solutions that affect only his own jurisdiction. It will not be possible to conclude a regional contract affecting parts of several voivodships. This solution limits rational and effective use of space. The government's propositions seem to suggest that transformation of political space is unnoticed or is seen as a threat to the interest of the central administration (Surdej 1999, Patrzalek 1999).

4. CONCLUSION

The identification of the relations between processes occurring in political space and the changes within various spatial units is not easy. This is a consequence of the complexity of these processes and the nature of transformations in regions or their parts. These changes may be abrupt and spectacular. They may be also slow and the results of some activities distant in time. No doubt, however, that the public administration reform has modified the perception of regional development and will modify the practice in preparation and implementation of plans. The possible situation, in which a local government requests the central government to stop its policy in a local jurisdiction because it collides with a regional program, means that local authorities have serious responsibility for development. It will be possible to assume this responsibility in a responsible manner when the problems discussed above are finally resolved.

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Resume

Reforma verejnej správy a podmienky regionálneho rozvoja

Zmeny, ktoré prebiehajú v Poľsku v posledných rokoch, ako aj predpokladaná integrácia Poľska do Európskej únie, kreovali nový komplex požiadaviek na krajinu vo vzťahu k jej sociálno-ekonomickému vývoju. Vojsvodstvá, základné administratívne regióny, sa dostali do osobitnej situácie. Od 1. januára 1999 sa vojsvodstvá stali samostatnými samosprávnymi jednotkami, v rámci ktorých budú uskutočňované politika štátu a štátne princípy regionálneho rozvoja.

Z pohľadu regionálneho vývoja Poľska v nových systémových podmienkach bude kľúčovú úlohu zohrávať šesť nasledovných problémov: určenie priorít vývoja, definovanie medziregionálnych vzťahov, stanovenie cieľov regionálneho vývoja a ich harmonizácia, optimalizovanie vzťahu región v štáte - štát v regióne, financovanie regionálneho vývoja a implementácia a koordinácia regionálnej rozvojovej politiky.

Identifikovanie osobitostí týchto problémov a implantovanie nových poznatkov v regionálnom rozvoji Poľska nebude vôbec jednoduché. Rešpektovať treba aj fakt, že reforma verejnej správy modifikovala percepciu nevyhnutných regionálnych zmien a bude modifikovať aj prípravu a implantáciu nových regionálnych plánov.