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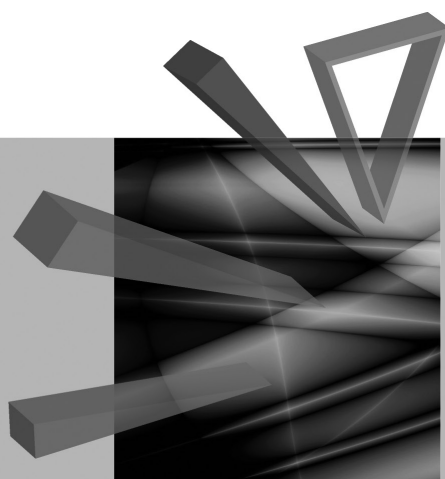
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# **Regional Economy in Theory and Practice**



edited by

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## **SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES AS STIMULI TO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT DURING A CRISIS**

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**Summary:** This article draws special attention to the effects of the operation of special economic zones located within Poland in the period from 2008, that is the year considered as the beginning of the global financial and economic crisis. It has been also assumed that it is important to verify the thesis about the effectiveness of special economic zones as the tools of social and economic development, especially in the context of decreasing unemployment.

**Keywords:** special economic zone, financial and economic crisis, effects of operation of special economic zones in Poland.

### **1. Introduction**

The modern world is grappling with various economic problems whose causes have not yet been fully defined. The researchers are engaged in a dispute about the ways of responding to them. To affect them actively or rather leave them to the free market? However, such a long existing division among economists acquires another meaning, especially when one becomes aware that the mechanisms and institutions that appear in the global economy necessitate a different reaction than previously. It seems that civilisation changes caused by huge social transformations do have an impact on the methods of effective influence. In other words, it is no longer possible to apply the same tools that used to be widespread and effective because the circumstances and environment conditions have changed [Radek 2010, p. 177].

In such a situation, each country tries to find some specific institutional approaches and economic and legal conditions allowing for the growth of competitiveness of its economy. With the use of certain determined instruments of the market economy, a country may stimulate positive processes enforcing such competitiveness and limit the negative consequences at the same time. The tools which are decisive for the economic development include the solutions existing in special economic zones (SEZ). Such zones, as well as the areas with a similar

intended use, have been established in many countries since other methods of encouraging investments were not effective enough. Practice shows that such solutions are still a relatively effective instrument for encouraging investments. After all, if they had proven ineffective, they simply would be no longer applied [Radek 2010, p. 177].

The aim of this article is to analyse the effects of operation of special economic zones in Poland from 2008, that is the year which is considered by many researchers as the beginning of the world financial and economic crisis, as well as their influence on the economic activation of regions. The numerical data is quoted from reports by the Ministry of Economy.

## **2. Establishment and development of special economic zones in Poland**

Zones with preferential conditions for business activity have been a permanent element of contemporary reality for decades (worldwide), and for several years in Poland. A special economic zone in legal terms is an administratively separate part of the country's territory, within which a specific system of legal norms applies. "Zone" means that that area is an enclave within the State territory. Determining a zone as "special" should be associated with the fact of a particular "special" regulation of it by provisions of law. The condition of "economic" means that the application of the solution regards economic issues. The legal norms – introduced by the act establishing a zone – are to protect, i.e. allow or facilitate the implementation of specific tasks and economic goals. The establishment of zones with preferential conditions for business activity is a form of the so-called indirect state intervention in the economy, that is such an intervention that involves a system of tax exemptions and preferences for the entities operating within a given zone [Waligórski 1997, p. 16].

The business activity within the area with investment privileges is subject to administrative and legal restrictions [Zbyd 1997, p. 273]. The Act of October 20, 1994 on special economic zones, defines the special economic zone as "separated according to the provisions of the Act, uninhabited part of territory of the Republic of Poland, where an economic activity may be conducted under the terms and conditions of the Act" [Ustawa z dnia 20 października 1994..., Article 2]. This means that the entities located within the zones, and satisfying the conditions in terms of the amounts of capital expenditure and/or created new jobs, may benefit from state aid in the form of exemption from income tax (CIT – corporate or PIT – personal income tax – depending on the legal form of the conducted business activity) and property tax (to be decided by the municipal authority).

The main idea of creating zones with preferential conditions for business activity in Poland, was striving to alleviate the effects of structural unemployment



in selected regions of the country by targeting new investments there, with a package of financial incentives.

During the establishment of special economic zones in Poland, it was assumed that they will serve both for the implementation of the aim of accelerating the economic development of part of the national territory, in particular by [Ustawa z dnia 20 października 1994..., Article 3]:

- development of certain business activities;
- development of new technological solutions and their use in the national economy;
- development of exports;
- increasing the competitiveness of manufactured products and provided services;
- development of existing industrial assets and economic infrastructure;
- creation of new jobs;
- development of unused natural resources, preserving the principles of environmental sustainability.

Such a formulation of goals for the areas with investment privileges suggests that on the one hand, they should be a tool of industrial policy implementation in the scope of the development of certain industry sectors, transfer of modern technologies and pro-export production support, and on the other hand, a significant instrument of regional policy [Bazydło, Smętkowski 2000, pp. 35–36].

The general goals of creating special economic zones in Poland defined in the act are made more precise by the Council of Ministers in a regulation concerning the establishment of a given zone, and by the minister responsible for the economy in the regulation specifying the plan of its operation. Although the legislature has formulated several goals for creating zones with preferential conditions for business activity, in practice, however, with the deepening of uneven economic development, the foremost is the objective of combating unemployment – particularly in regions where unemployment is structural, but there are conditions allowing the acquisition of relevant investments. The first Polish experience shows that the establishment of individual zones was justified by the necessity of limiting structural unemployment and to prevent the further exploitation of that process, solving the problem of restructuring the local industries (especially protection against the negative, often unavoidable impact of restructuring), finalizing important long-term contracts of an economic and technical significance strategic for the State and the rational use of available resources within the zone and in the region [Lizińska, Kisiel 2008, pp. 13–14].

Polish special economic zones do not have any centuries-old traditions. The oldest of them were established little more than fifteen years ago, but their rapid development caused that they have had a significant impact on the regions in which they are based.

The first SEZ established on September 5, 1995, was EURO-PARK Mielec based on the model of the Irish export processing zone in Shannon. The next two special economic zones were created a year later – the Katowice Zone was set up on June 18, 1996, and the Suwałki Zone on June 25. The year 1997 abounded in the establishment of privileged areas. In the period from April to October 1997, fourteen special economic zones were created: the Legnica, Łódź and Wałbrzych economic zones in the first half year, and the remaining eleven economic zones towards the end of the year, that is the Kostrzyn-Słubice, Słupsk, Tarnobrzeg, Starachowice, Tczew, Warmia and Mazury, Częstochowa, Żarnowiec, Kamienna Góra, Mazowsze (Technopark in Modlin), and Cracow (operating in a form of a technological park) economic zones [Hajduga 2005, p. 150]. In 2000, there were seventeen areas with special privileges throughout the country. Due to lack of investors' interest, the Częstochowa zone was liquidated in March 2001; the same happened to the Mazowsze zone. In July 2001, the Tczew and Żarnowiec zones were merged and created the Pomeranian Zone. Such changes resulted in decreasing the number of zones in Poland to the present fourteen.

### **3. Effects of operation of special economic zones in Poland in the years 2008–2011**

The analysis of the effectiveness of the operation of zones with preferential conditions for business activity and their influence on their environment is a very complex task. It is caused by a range of problems which preclude their synthetic assessment. The first group of problems is related to the sphere in which the research is conducted. The changes in the administrative division of the country seriously disrupt the possibility of the continuous aggregation of data. The next obstacle is the lack of adequate documentation that would evidence the occurrence of the regularities searched for. Therefore, a full analysis is not possible to complete and some of its elements may be based only on the immeasurable opinions on the occurrence of a given phenomenon. The next group of problems arises directly from the specificity of the researched object, that is a special economic zone. Its changeability in time and space results in numerous imperfections which lead to complications in the dynamic analysis of the phenomenon. On the one hand, we are not able to determine whether the transformations that have taken place in recent years result from the operation of the applied instrument or are only a consequence of time delays in “expenditures-effects” sequence which coincides with the solutions applied earlier [Broszkiewicz 2006]. The assessment of the significance and impact of zones with preferential conditions for business activity on regional development requires research in the scope of the investment processes in the sub-zones system. However, it is sometimes simply impossible to obtain complete and reliable information

concerning – for example – the value of invested capital or the level of employment in individual sub-zones.

In view of this argument, it seems justified to carry out a dynamic analysis concerning special economic zones located in Poland with the elements of a multi-dimensional comparative analysis. Also, in order to observe the diversity of zones, special attention has been paid to the basic indexes and ratios characterising each zone. The capital expenditure and employment have been also thoroughly analysed.

### 3.1. Capital expenditure

The costs of investments made in zones with preferential conditions for business activity were incurred by both domestic and foreign companies (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Value of incurred capital expenditure in special economic zones in 2008–2011 (in current prices)

| Zone                 | Capital expenditure<br>(as at the end of the year, in PLN million) |           |           |           | Dynamics of capital expenditure<br>(previous year = 100%) |       |       |       |
|----------------------|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|---|-------|-------|-------|
|                      | 2008   | 2009      | 2010      | 2011      | 2008  | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  |
| Kamiennogórska       | 1 332.90   | 1 436.20  | 1 551.10  | 1 667.20  | 109.6   | 107.8 | 108.0 | 107.5 |
| Katowicka            | 13 843.70  | 16 025.30 | 16 869.60 | 18 154.60 | 117.7   | 115.8 | 105.3 | 107.6 |
| Kostrzyńsko-Słubicka | 3 125.10   | 3 332.70  | 3 786.30  | 4 215.50  | 127.5   | 106.6 | 113.6 | 111.3 |
| Krakowska            | 1 243.10   | 1 564.10  | 1 655.70  | 1 773.80  | 121.2   | 125.8 | 105.9 | 107.1 |
| Legnicka             | 4 024.00   | 4 257.60  | 4 568.80  | 4 889.00  | 111.0   | 105.8 | 107.3 | 107.0 |
| Łódzka               | 5 801.10   | 7 163.80  | 8 184.80  | 9 033.10  | 148.9   | 123.5 | 114.3 | 110.4 |
| Mielecka             | 3 781.90   | 4 177.10  | 4 690.30  | 5 097.00  | 121.5   | 110.4 | 112.3 | 108.7 |
| Pomorska             | 3 701.80   | 5 910.10  | 6 727.40  | 7 298.90  | 139.8   | 159.7 | 113.8 | 108.5 |
| Słupska              | 728.30   | 769.10    | 963.60    | 1 106.50  | 118.3   | 105.6 | 125.3 | 114.8 |
| Starachowicka        | 980.20   | 1 260.20  | 1 528.90  | 1 621.00  | 132.5   | 128.6 | 121.3 | 106.0 |
| Suwalska             | 1 341.40   | 1 376.50  | 1 474.90  | 1 596.70  | 134.0   | 102.6 | 107.1 | 108.3 |
| Tarnobrzaska         | 4 733.00   | 5 459.40  | 6 081.40  | 6 792.90  | 114.6   | 115.3 | 111.4 | 111.7 |
| Wałbrzyska           | 9 626.70   | 11 219.80 | 12 105.40 | 13 095.00 | 122.6   | 116.5 | 107.9 | 108.2 |
| Warmińsko-Mazurska   | 2 442.50   | 2 637.80  | 3 033.40  | 3 328.90  | 121.7   | 108.0 | 115.0 | 109.7 |
| Total                | 56 705.70  | 66 589.70 | 73 221.60 | 79 670.10 | 123.0   | 117.4 | 110.0 | 108.8 |

Source: own elaboration pursuant to the data given by the Ministry of Economy.

Pursuant to the data included in Table 1, the dynamics of capital expenditure in different years and zones located within the territory of Poland were diversified and conditioned by numerous factors depending both on the managing companies (in the scope of encouraging the investors) and on the possibilities of the entrepreneurs themselves. However, it is difficult to expect a regular growing tendency because the inflow of investors is not systematic and one big investment is enough to significantly increase the dynamics of capital expenditure in a given year.

In 2008, a considerable increase in the dynamics of capital expenditure in comparison with the previous year was noted in the Łódź zone (by 48.9%), the Pomeranian zone (by 39.8%), and the Suwałki zone (by 34%). In 2009, the highest increase of capital expenditure in comparison with 2008 was in the Pomeranian SEZ (by 59.7%), the Starachowice SEZ (by 28.6%), and the Cracow SEZ (by 25.8%). In 2010, the Słupsk zone was the one with the highest dynamics of investments. The value of investments in this zone increased by 25.3% in comparison with 2009. The relatively high dynamics of capital expenditure were also observed in the Starachowice SEZ where the capital expenditure grew by 21.30%. Whereas in the Warmia and Mazury zone, the capital expenditure increased by 15% in 2010 in comparison with the previous year.

By the end of 2011, the entrepreneurs conducting the business activity within all special economic zones in Poland made capital expenditure amounting to PLN 79,670.10 million.

In 2011, the highest share in the overall investment belonged to the Katowice SEZ and equalled 22.8%. It was followed by the Wałbrzych zone with the share of 16.4%. The percentage of investment made in the Łódź SEZ in the overall capital expenditure was 11.3% at the end of 2011. The share of investment in total expenditure within the remaining eleven zones with preferential conditions for business activity did not exceed 10%. The Słupsk zone had the worst result in this scope which equalled 1.4% of overall investment.

The Słupsk SEZ was once again the one with the highest dynamics of investment. In 2011, its value increased by 14.8% in comparison with the previous year. The relatively high dynamics of capital expenditure were also observed in the Tarnobrzeg SEZ where the capital expenditure grew by 11.7% when compared with the previous year. An increase in investment exceeding 10% in 2011 occurred also in the Kostrzyn-Słubice SEZ and the Łódź SEZ.

Pursuant to the data included in Table 1, the rate of increase of the accumulated value of investment has been slowing down since 2009, which is the consequence of the financial and economic crisis.

### 3.2. Jobs

Created jobs are one of the criteria describing the companies operating within the special economic zones. Bearing in mind that those enterprises conduct their business activity in an economically separate area, it is relatively easy to define all economic parameters for this group of companies and determine whether it stands out against other enterprises in the country [Pastusiak 2011, p. 228].

The changes in the level of employment (accumulated figures) in the zones with preferential conditions for business activity operating in Poland in 2008–2011 are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Level of employment in special economic zones in 2008–2011

| Zone                 | Employment<br>(as at the end of the year, in persons) |         |         |         | Dynamics of jobs<br>(previous year = 100%) |       |       |       |
|----------------------|---|---------|---------|---------|--|-------|-------|-------|
|                      | 2008  | 2009    | 2010    | 2011    | 2008                                       | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  |
| Kamiennogórska       | 4 469   | 4 087   | 4 349   | 4 618   | 88.8                                       | 91.5  | 106.4 | 106.2 |
| Katowicka            | 42 593  | 40 724  | 43 473  | 48 541  | 120.7                                      | 95.6  | 106.8 | 111.7 |
| Kostrzyńsko-Słubicka | 16 446  | 15 601  | 17 252  | 19 089  | 127.6                                      | 94.9  | 110.6 | 110.6 |
| Krakowska            | 7 699   | 8 594   | 8 936   | 9 790   | 138.3                                      | 111.6 | 104.0 | 109.6 |
| Legnicka             | 8 698   | 8 079   | 8 803   | 9 300   | 107.3                                      | 92.9  | 109.0 | 105.6 |
| Łódzka               | 18 983  | 20 844  | 23 248  | 24 824  | 128.6                                      | 109.8 | 111.5 | 106.8 |
| Mielecka             | 15 824  | 15 558  | 16 516  | 18 387  | 120.8                                      | 98.3  | 106.2 | 111.3 |
| Pomorska             | 17 545  | 19 013  | 19 275  | 18 812  | 100.3                                      | 108.4 | 101.4 | 97.6  |
| Słupska              | 2 728   | 2 383   | 2 683   | 3 390   | 125.1                                      | 87.4  | 112.6 | 126.4 |
| Starachowicka        | 8 030   | 6 512   | 6 349   | 7 270   | 115.2                                      | 81.1  | 97.5  | 114.5 |
| Suwalska             | 5 132   | 5 026   | 5 471   | 5 452   | 100.7                                      | 97.9  | 108.9 | 99.7  |
| Tarnobrzaska         | 22 538  | 23 335  | 27 832  | 28 710  | 119.9                                      | 103.5 | 119.3 | 103.2 |
| Wałbrzyska           | 30 924  | 28 473  | 30 057  | 31 276  | 107.9                                      | 92.1  | 105.6 | 104.1 |
| Warmińsko-Mazurska   | 8 933   | 9 799   | 10 558  | 12 135  | 106.2                                      | 109.7 | 107.7 | 114.9 |
| Total                | 210 542   | 208 028 | 224 802 | 241 594 | 115.5                                      | 98.8  | 108.1 | 107.5 |

Source: own elaboration pursuant to the data given by the Ministry of Economy.

In 2008, the overall employment grew most in comparison with the previous year in the Cracow zone (by 38.3%), the Łódź zone (by 28.6%), and the Kostrzyn-Słubice zone (by 27.6%). Whereas the Kamienna Góra SEZ for Small Enterprises witnessed the reduction of the employment by many business entities and thus the number of jobs dropped by 11.2%.

The decrease in overall employment in all special economic zones in Poland in 2009 – when compared with 2008 – by 1.2% with a parallel increase in capital expenditure by 17.4% was only partially the consequence of the economic depression. Another equally significant factor was the increase in the number of innovative investments which caused the significant replacement of human work with the applied technologies. When comparing the year 2009 with the previous one, the overall employment level dropped the most in the Starachowice zone (by 18.9%), the Słupsk zone (by 12.6%), and the Kamienna Góra zone (by 8.5%). Whereas the biggest increase in the number of jobs was observed in the Cracow SEZ (by 11.6%), the Łódź SEZ (by 9.8%), and the Warmia and Mazury SEZ (by 9.7%).

In 2010, the overall employment grew most in comparison with 2009 in the Tarnobrzeg zone (by 19.3%), the Słupsk zone (by 12.6%), and the Łódź zone (by 11.5%). A decrease in the number of jobs by 2.5% occurred only in the Starachowice SEZ.

By the end of 2011, the entrepreneurs conducting business activity within all special economic zones in Poland employed a total of 241,594 persons. In 2011, the overall employment grew most in comparison with the previous year in the

Ślusk zone (by 26.4%), the Warmia and Mazury zone (by 14.9%), and the Starachowice zone (by 14.5%). A decrease in the number of jobs was noted only in the Suwałki SEZ (by 0.3%) and the Pomeranian SEZ (by 2.4%).

#### 4. Conclusion

The assessment of the effectiveness of the operation of zones with preferential conditions for business activity and their influence on their environment is a task requiring thorough and detailed research on each of them separately. Simultaneously, such an assessment is a difficult task because it is based on multiple factors and it should be borne in mind that the same fact may be assessed in different ways by various entities or stakeholders' groups [Kubin 2010, p. 32].

Special economic zones operating in Poland are characterised by diversified investment attractiveness, which has been reflected in the degree of their development. The clever use of the possibilities given by the areas with preferential conditions for investments may be of benefit to both the entrepreneurs, regional and local communities, and the local government units. These are the entities decisive for the success of those zones and whether they may be considered as an actually effective mechanism of entrepreneurship development and support.

Special economic zones have become a permanent element of the economic sphere in Poland and they are an important factor behind the developing innovativeness of the enterprises located therein. At the same time, they play a significant role in shaping the competitiveness of each region as part of the economic sphere in our country.

The discussion presented in this article refers to a wider range of issues and also does not fully exhaust the explored topics. Therefore, the author intends to continue the research in that scope, especially to analyse the impact of special economic zones located in Poland on the social and economic sphere. It is worth emphasising that the complete verification of the phenomenon will be possible only after the end of a specified operating period of the applied regional policy instrument. The question about the future of entrepreneurs investing in privileged areas, which is already relevant, opens a new stage in the history of the research on special economic zones.

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## SPECJALNE STREFY EKONOMICZNE JAKO STYMULATOR ROZWOJU REGIONALNEGO W DOBIE KRYZYSU

**Streszczenie:** W niniejszym artykule szczególną uwagę poświęcono efektom funkcjonowania specjalnych stref ekonomicznych zlokalizowanych na obszarze Polski, począwszy od roku 2008, tj. roku uznawanego za początek globalnego kryzysu finansowego i gospodarczego. Za istotną uznano również weryfikację postawionej tezy o skuteczność specjalnych stref ekonomicznych jako narzędzia służącego rozwojowi społecznemu i gospodarczemu, szczególnie w kontekście zmniejszania bezrobocia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** specjalna strefa ekonomiczna, kryzys finansowy i gospodarczy, efekty funkcjonowania SSE w Polsce.