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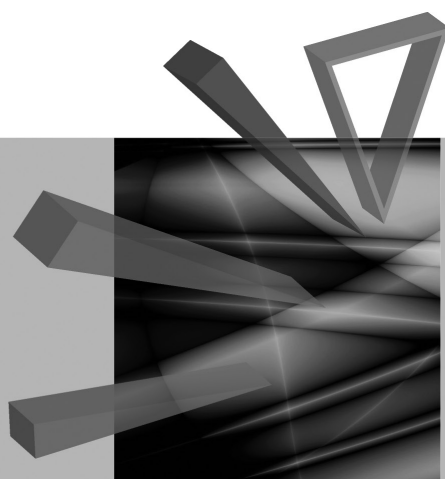
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Contents

Introduction	9
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Part 1. Theoretical aspects of regional economy

Ryszard Brol: Innovation vs. regional development	13
Ewa Glińska, Anna Kononiuk: The concept of regional strategy of smart specialization	27
Hanna Kruk: Resilience, competitiveness and sustainable development of the region – similarities and differences	35
Andrzej Sztando: Regional innovation strategy implementation – system model covering the results of the analysis of the Polish experiences	43
Andrzej Raszkowski: Creativity in the context of regional development – selected issues	52
Yuliya Melnyk: Regional peculiarities of the global art market	62
Elżbieta Załoga, Dariusz Milewski: The impact of transport on regional development	71
Alina Kulczyk-Dynowska: Diversified spatial neighbourhood – a metropolis and a national park	79

Part 2. The results of European regional space research and analyses

Malgorzata Markowska, Danuta Strahl: Polish regions against the background of European regional space with regard to smart growth – aggregate perspective	89
Beata Bal-Domańska: Does smart growth enhance economic cohesion? An analysis for the EU regions of new and old accession countries	100
Elżbieta Sobczak: Typology of European regions vs. effects of workforce changes by the level of research and development activities intensity ...	111
Malgorzata Karczewska: Gross domestic expenditures on research and development in GDP of European Union countries – changes in trends	121
Marzena Grzesiak, Anita Richert-Kaźmierska: Educational engagement of the elderly – the experiences of selected Baltic Sea Region countries	133
Ewa Coll: The classification of EU and Eastern Partnership countries regarding economic development level – a dynamic approach	144
Anetta Waśniewska: The potential of the population in the Baltic Sea Region in the years 2001–2011	157
Alla Melnyk: Modernization of regional structural policy mechanisms in Ukraine in the process of its EU integration	169

Part 3. Selected problems of Polish regions functioning and development

Dariusz Głuszczyk: Barriers to innovation activities in industrial enterprises by Polish regions in 2004–2006 and 2008–2010	181
Piotr Hajduga: Special economic zones as stimuli to regional development during a crisis	191
Adam Przybyłowski: Sustainable transport development prerequisites in selected Polish regions	199
Mariusz E. Sokołowicz: The impact of transnational corporations' activity on regional human capital. Case study of the Łódź metropolitan area ...	210
Anna Jasińska-Biliczak: Interregional cooperation as the stimulation of proinnovation actions – the casual analysis	222
Franciszek Adameczuk: Cross-border cooperation of Lower Silesia and Saxony – current results and prospects	230
Agnieszka Barczak: Managing the production process of a group of agricultural farms of the Pomorze and Mazury Region and their economic development	240
Tomasz Dorożyński, Wojciech Urbaniak: Experiences of county employment agencies in the use of EU structural funds to promote employment. The case of the Łódź voivodeship	249
Małgorzata Golińska-Pieszynska: Contemporary innovative practices in a regional context of the Łódź region	260

Streszczenia

Część 1. Teoretyczne aspekty gospodarki regionalnej

Ryszard Broł: Innowacyjność a rozwój regionalny	26
Ewa Glińska, Anna Koniński: Koncepcja regionalnej strategii inteligentnej specjalizacji	34
Hanna Kruk: Rezyliencja, konkurencyjność i rozwój zrównoważony regionów – podobieństwa i różnice	42
Andrzej Sztando: Wdrażanie regionalnej strategii innowacji – model systemu stanowiący rezultat analizy polskich doświadczeń	51
Andrzej Raszkowski: Kreatywność w kontekście rozwoju regionalnego – wybrane zagadnienia	61
Yuliya Melnyk: Regionalna specyfika globalnego rynku sztuki	70
Elżbieta Zaloga, Dariusz Milewski: Wpływ transport na rozwój regionalny	78
Alina Kulczyk-Dynowska: Zróżnicowane sąsiedztwo w przestrzeni – metropolie i park narodowy	86

Część 2. Rezultaty badań i analiz nad europejską przestrzenią regionalną

Małgorzata Markowska, Danuta Strahl: Polskie regiony na tle europejskiej przestrzeni regionalnej w kontekście inteligentnego rozwoju – ujęcie agregatowe	99
Beata Bal-Domańska: Czy inteligentny rozwój sprzyja spójności ekonomicznej? Analiza dla regionów państw Unii Europejskiej nowego i starego rozszerzenia	110
Elżbieta Sobczak: Typologia regionów europejskich a efekty zmian liczby pracujących według poziomu intensywności prac badawczo-rozwojowych	120
Małgorzata Karczewska: Udział nakładów na badania i rozwój w PKB krajów Unii Europejskiej – tendencje zmian	132
Marzena Grzesiak, Anita Richert-Kaźmierska: Zaangażowanie osób starszych w edukację – doświadczenia wybranych państw regionu Morza Bałtyckiego	143
Ewa Coll: Klasyfikacja państw UE i krajów Partnerstwa Wschodniego ze względu na poziom rozwoju gospodarczego – ujęcie dynamiczne	156
Anetta Waśniewska: Potencjał ludności regionu Morza Bałtyckiego w latach 2001-2011	168
Alla Melnyk: Modernizacja mechanizmów regionalnej polityki strukturalnej Ukrainy w procesie integracji z Unią Europejską	177

Część 3. Wybrane problem funkcjonowania i rozwoju polskich regionów

Dariusz Głuszczuk: Przeszkody działalności innowacyjnej przedsiębiorstw przemysłowych według regionów Polski w latach 2004–2006 i 2008–2010 .	189
Piotr Hajduga: Specjalne Strefy Ekonomiczne jako stymulator rozwoju regionalnego w dobie kryzysu	198
Adam Przybyłowski: Przesłanki zrównoważonego rozwoju transportu w wybranych polskich regionach	209
Mariusz E. Sokolowicz: Wpływ korporacji transnarodowych na rozwój kapitału ludzkiego w regionie. Przykład łódzkiego obszaru metropolitalnego	221
Anna Jasińska-Biliczak: Współpraca międzyregionalna stymulantem działań proinnowacyjnych – przykład województwa opolskiego	229
Franciszek Adamczuk: Współpraca transgraniczna Dolnego Śląska i Saksonii – aktualne wyniki i perspektywy	239
Agnieszka Barczak: Zarządzanie procesem produkcji grupy gospodarstw rolnych regionu Pomorze i Mazury z uwzględnieniem poziomu rozwoju gospodarczego	248

Tomasz Dorożyński, Wojciech Urbaniak: Doświadczenia powiatowych urzędów pracy w zakresie wykorzystywania funduszy strukturalnych UE w celu promocji zatrudnienia. Przykład województwa łódzkiego	259
Małgorzata Golińska-Pieszyńska: Współczesne praktyki innowacyjne w kontekście regionalnym w oparciu o region łódzki	267

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CONTEMPORARY INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT OF THE ŁÓDŹ REGION

Summary: Organizations maintain or improve their position on the market as a result of effective innovations that are a socially complex and relatively difficult phenomenon, as they include science, technology, production and community. While assuming the criterion of the complexity of an innovative process, one has to aim at the creation of innovations based on networks. A search for various sources of support, and joining them into a network that will help in the implementation of a new innovative concept, is a challenge for creative entrepreneurs. The attempt was made to investigate the aims of the Łódź region at indicating good patterns of innovative activities that will certainly influence the increase of competitiveness of this region.

Keywords: innovations, region, innovative networks.

1. Introduction

Although the terms created in the previous century, such as a knowledge-based society and a knowledge-based economy have stood the test of time, as the result of the creation of mechanisms of world economy, globalisation and various regional initiatives where an attempt to implement the Lisbon Strategy in the European Union was one of them, today it is necessary to apply a new approach to the issue of innovation and innovativeness. It turns out that the model approach to innovation, to the functioning of innovation systems and building learning regions, does not work when confronted with the world crisis we are currently experiencing. Therefore, it is necessary to consider what the current innovative practices are like, whether they stopped at the point of deliberation on the so-called innovative policies or if there is a constant return to the models of innovative systems and an elaboration of almost schematic policies and strategies.

The aim of this article is to present and summarize selected initiatives and innovative practices in the region of Łódź, as the fact that the actual process of creating innovations should not be just a subject of interest of the authorities and

various institutions in the region, but it should be within the reach of organizations and the entire society. It has to be mentioned that in the micro-perspective, special attention should be paid to the elaboration of the concept of the innovative process in the aspect of its management.

2. Innovation compared with the concept of innovative process

Innovations have been the subject of various studies for many years, starting from the studies of individual researchers and their teams, through research inspired by various scientific institutions and local, national and international organizations, ending with systematic statistical surveys. The scope of the notion of innovation is very broad, it has many definitions, and many scientists have interpreted its meaning (e.g. G. Altschuler, P. Drucker), however, it has to be said that the term “innovation” was introduced to economic sciences by J. Schumpeter [Schumpeter 1960, p. 60] in the previous century. In contemporary literature [Berschi, Malerba, Orseignio 2000, pp. 389–390], two paths of Schumpeter’s innovation are analysed. The first path is characterized by the so-called “creative destruction”, which is connected with the expansion of the innovative base through the entry of new innovators whereas the other is “creative accumulation” connected with the predominance of big companies and high barriers of entry (specific technologies, unique qualifications in the scope of research and development activity, production, distribution and the result of owned non-material resources in the form of e.g. external relations).

New models of innovative activities that are created are the new ways of generating innovations in an organization. From the point of view of an innovative process realised in an organization, one has to assume that the creation and gathering of ideas are the beginning of this process, regardless of the place of their creation. The next stages concern the choice of those ideas that have a chance for success, and a decision is then made on the method of their realisation and implementation, meaning introducing the innovation into organizational reality. One has to consider the fact that in order to achieve rational benefits from the “original technical creativity”, the innovative process cannot be a uniform unity, but it has to be composed of stages, in which proper measures and techniques of control of this process in the aspect of management should be used. A discerning analysis of every substage will help to avoid mistakes in the future [Nowak-Far 2000, p. 200].

It has to be mentioned that not all innovations have the same organizational dimension. A pharmaceutical company may deem “intelligent packaging” very valuable to inform users that somebody has opened it, however it can be completely uninterested in a new kind of a touch screen. On the other hand, a bank that has its network of ATMs, will treat these innovations in a completely different way [Fenn, Raskino 2010, p. 72]. Therefore, it can be believed that an organization shows a smaller or bigger tendency to adopt or avoid innovations. According to

J. Fenn and M. Raskino [Fenn, Raskino 2010, p. 72], in order to make a good decision on the time when an innovation should be adopted, the following issues have to be considered:

- a potential value of innovation for an organization;
- a current phase of maturity;
- a company's ability to tolerate and manage the risk.

Many companies that consider an innovation as their main target are not able to fully engage into it, because a comprehensive concept of an innovative process has not been developed before, and it is typical of the nature of innovations that they do not always bring the expected benefits. The issue can become further complicated by the fact that sometimes the innovative process generates profits, though not a direct one (through a specific new product), but through benefits sometimes hard to detect. It has to be firmly said that during the innovative process knowledge is created, where part of it can be used in many ways to generate profits. An organization often forgets the fact that an innovation influences keeping new excellent specialists in a company (and this has to be regarded as a creative factor of the organization). Examples of companies show that every time Intel engineers develop a new generation of microprocessors, the creativity of the organization's members constitutes a driving force of the innovative process [Harvard Business Essentials 2005, p. 48]. According to Clayton M. Christensen [Christensen 2010, p. 15], it may happen that companies previously famous for their innovation skills, show their weakness and lose a business struggle at some point (both Apple and IBM were left 5 years behind the leaders in the introduction of portable computers on the market). The majority of new technologies, called "continuing technologies", improve the functionality of products, but sometimes the so-called "disruptive technologies" appear and stop the previous development of a given product. The result of disruptive innovations is the worsening of the functionality of the products. Those products are usually cheaper, simpler, smaller, often with worse effectiveness characteristics than the products previously available on the market [Christensen 2010, pp. 21–22]. Therefore, it can be said that the management of an innovative process that is not fully developed may sometimes lead to a company's market failure. It has to be understood that in certain situations, innovations do not mean only positive changes and a new combination of existing possibilities in connection with an organization, even though they can be analysed as innovations based on networks and a source of competitive edge in the region.

3. Network of connections in innovativeness

Although good ideas, energy and passion are the necessary conditions for the innovative success, the most successful entrepreneurs on the market are also aware

of the fact that they have to enter into partnership relations with others, on various platforms and in various dimensions (local innovation networks, innovation networks in the region). The ability to efficiently operate in the networks, both during their creation and maintenance of their functioning in order to build a long-term and efficient model of innovative process, is of great significance.

In reality, one can find quite a diversified approach to networking, although the network of connections is something more than a simple total of bilateral connections (or partners). From the configuration of the nature and composition of networks, one can gain the benefits resulting from common specialization, common use of infrastructure, and each party will be interested in sharing information and providing full collaboration. Each organization, and especially an enterprise, has a given group of partners with whom it cooperates (universities, suppliers, clients, distributors, etc.). Over time, because of increasing trust, interpersonal relations are strengthened, and because of that, according to F. Bidault and W. Fischer “companies associated in networks are more prone to purchase and sell technologies in their circle” [Tidd, Bessant 2011, p. 394].

In Poland, many discussions focus on the innovativeness of companies and regions. Research on various aspects of awareness of an individual’s privacy, conducted in 2010 in the region of Łódź, provided an example of sectoral innovativeness [Golińska-Pieszyńska 2011, pp. 145–155]. The general result of this research shows the awareness of the importance and essence of privacy among the respondents, assuming that the creation of sectoral innovations enables not only to identify the problems resulting from the creation of new frameworks of a contemporary economy and society, but also to get acquainted with the foundations and mechanisms of the functioning of innovative practices according to deliberations in the socio-psychological context, where such practices facilitate action, social progress, development and general effectiveness in the region, thus leading to an increase of its innovativeness. Having observed previous activities in the region of Łódź, it is difficult to be fully optimistic. Therefore, on the one hand good examples of innovative practices become very important, and on the other hand the innovative policy in the regional dimension should be analysed.

An important quality of a regional innovative system is the historically shaped culture and collected knowledge and experience, creating a unique character of particular relations and interactions. As a result of the activities of “Collaborative network of cooperation and exchange of experiences” concerning the interventions within the Human Capital Operational Programme (HC OP), supporting the realisation of the Regional Innovation Strategy INTREGISNET, implemented within the grant of the Technical Assistance of HC OP jointly by Intermediate Bodies of HC OP – Office of the Marshall in Łódź (as the grant coordinator), Office of the Marshall of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship, Office of the Marshall of the Pomorskie voivodeship, Office of the Marshall of the Śląskie

voivodeship, Office of the Marshall of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship – a Regional Thematic Network for Łódzkie voivodeship was created [WWW2].

The benefits of gaining knowledge and technologies from external sources encourage companies to establish and develop various forms of cooperation with external partners (R&D entities, institutions mediating in the transfer of innovations, financial institutions, etc.). Generally speaking, the aim of this cooperation is to gain access to sources of new knowledge. This means formulating innovations in a systemic manner. Innovations are the result of interactions and feedback occurring between “actors” dealing with the creation, transfer and use of various kinds of knowledge. The term “innovation system” then means a collection of various subjects influencing processes of innovations and connections (relations) occurring between them. In practice, it is the region that most often takes up initiatives that are supposed to improve the transfer of knowledge and innovativeness. The Regional Thematic Network [WWW2] for the Łódzkie voivodeship within the Human Capital Operational Programme, constitutes a forum of dialogue between the beneficiaries implementing innovative projects on the one hand, and experts and practitioners in the field that the projects concern on the other hand.

The need to support innovativeness was an impulse for the development of the Regional Innovation Strategy Project – RIS 2030. This project is a continuation of the project “RIS Actualization – Research and Monitoring” implemented from 2008 to 2010 [WWW1]. The New Regional Innovation Strategy is supposed to contribute to an increase of innovativeness and competitiveness of the region, to stimulate the development of innovations in companies in Łódź, mainly as the result of activities within the scope of the transfer of knowledge as per Measure 8.2. Currently, within Priority VIII HCOP – Regional Human Resources for the Economy, which aims at the development of a qualified workforce and capable of adaptation and the improvement of functioning of the change management system, the following activities are conducted:

1. Developing a workforce and enterprises in the region,
2. Transfer of knowledge.

As part of Measure 8.1 and Sub-measure 8.1.3 Strengthening local partnership for adaptiveness, twelve projects have already been realised, whereas four projects are currently in progress. Within the framework of Measure 8.2 and Sub-measure 8.2.1 Support to cooperation of scientific environment and enterprises, by the end of August 2012, as many as two hundred and fifteen projects were completed, and thirty projects are in progress. Below are listed the selected projects implemented within Measure 8.2 “TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE” in the region of Łódź, that are especially important for innovations and innovativeness in the region.

Innovation Assistant – adapting solutions facilitating the cooperation of scientific and business environment from the region of Lower Austria in the Łódzkie voivodeship. The main aim of this project is the organization of

internships in the companies for fourteen “Innovation Assistants”. This initiative is addressed to entrepreneurs in the Łódzkie voivodeship (especially from the small and medium business sector) and students in the final years of studies, doctoral students and PhDs who graduated from universities in the Łódzkie voivodeship (mainly the University of Łódź, Łódź University of Technology, Medical University of Łódź). The beneficiary of the project is the Foundation for Promotion of Entrepreneurship in Łódź.

Łódzki Spinacz – cooperation of business and science. The main aim of this project is to support the scientific and business environment by organising three editions of “information campaigns” and four conferences to promote the transfer of knowledge and innovations, as well as to provide training and consulting on opportunities of and benefits from establishing and running spin off/spin out companies for 485 people in the Łódzkie voivodeship within two years of the project. The target group for this project includes people from this voivodeship and it is directly addressed to employees of enterprises in Łódź, researchers, scientists and academics, doctoral students, students and graduates in the Łódzkie voivodeship. The beneficiary of this project is Grupa ERGO sp. z o.o.

Łódź World of Innovation. This project provides internships and training courses to a specific number of researchers working for enterprises that are crucial for the development of the region of Łódź (electronics, ITC, biotechnology, pharmacy, chemistry). The aim of this project is the improvement of skills of thirty two researchers and academics in respect of commercialization of knowledge and the increase of knowledge on the importance of activities directed at innovation in the area of science and business, through participation in training and internships in enterprises, which will result in the development of innovative solutions for companies in the period from July 2012 to September 2013. The beneficiary of this project is INVESTIN sp. z o.o.

The described innovative practices [Golińska-Pieszyńska 2011, pp. 145–155] and the conducted initiatives and activities in the region of Łódź show a high level of commitment to an increase of competitiveness of this region, which means directing future initiatives at a further increase of its innovativeness. An attempt was made to show that various projects and initiatives conducted in the Łódzkie voivodeship that were oriented at an increase of innovativeness of this region and the development of both good practices and then model enterprises were of a great importance for cooperation and building knowledge and innovations.

4. Conclusion

The attempt taken to analyse the region of Łódź is aimed at the presentation of good patterns of innovative actions, which will certainly facilitate the creation of many effective networks of cooperation in an innovative activity. Approaching it from a

broader perspective of actions in the community in this region, the network structure aimed at innovation includes general connections of organizations created for the implementation of common tasks and mutual communication on the one hand, whereas on the other hand it means the search for various sources of support, both on the intellectual, financial and social platform and joining them into a network which will facilitate the realisation of a new innovative concept. The multidimensional nature of innovativeness is a fact. Good patterns of innovation activities may facilitate the market success of many organizations, this being no longer an illusion because of an extraordinary intellectual exertion and various types of resources that are necessary for the implementation of the innovative process.

A complex approach to the innovative process was proposed in this article, both when it comes to theory and innovative practices. This paper presents various projects conducted in the region of Łódź (including those aimed at networks) and initiatives oriented at an increase of innovativeness in this region. An attempt was made to show that not only the innovative development of business activity in the region is important as an element of a regional innovation strategy, but also the cooperation based on creating knowledge and innovations within various initiatives and networks may be treated as a way to increase the competitiveness of the region of Łódź.

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[WWW2] www.pokl.lodzkie.pl, July 2012.

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Streszczenie: Organizacje utrzymują lub poprawiają swoje pozycje na rynku dzięki efektywnym innowacjom. Wyzwaniem dla kreatywnych przedsiębiorców jest poszukiwanie różnych źródeł wsparcia, zarówno na płaszczyźnie intelektualnej, jak i finansowej czy społecznej. Podejście do zarządzania oparte na strukturze sieciowej zdecydowanie ułatwi zrealizowanie nowej koncepcji innowacyjnej. Podjęta próba wglądu w region łódzki nakierowana jest na wskazanie dobrych wzorców działań innowacyjnych, co zapewne pozwoli w przyszłości wykreować nowe, skuteczne sieci współpracy w działalności innowacyjnej, a co zdecydowanie wpłynie na wzrost konkurencyjności w regionie.

Słowa kluczowe: innowacje, region, sieci innowacyjne.