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Towards regionalisation in Poland's social policy²

Summary

The article aims to demonstrate that today's Poland needs a move toward the embracement of regionalism in social policy, and that this evolution must be supported by research as well as practical endeavours. The rationale can be sought in many external and, primarily, internal factors. The nation's present living standard and level of awareness call for better coordination of institutional efforts, empowerment of regional governments, and social policies that are more closely attuned to local preferences. The question that remains open is to what extent this decentralisation should be a top-down process, and to what extent it should occur bottom-up, driven by independent initiatives undertaken by regional governments (with relevant regulations following in their wake). Either process entails devolving the decision making power to regions, enabling them to control social transfers, redistribute and allocate funds to social services, and adjust relevant policies to the region's needs and potential. Under the redefinition of social policy proposed in this

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² The origins of local government in post-communist Poland should be traced back not so much to the 1990 Act on Commune/Municipality Government as the 1999 Decentralization Law. The latter redrew the territorial divisions while establishing three levels of local government: region/province (*voivodeship*), district (*poviat*), and commune/municipality (*gmina*), clearly delineating the powers assigned to each level. Cf. Golinowska, Rysz-Kowalczyk, 2014, p. 2.

paper, the availability and the amount of social benefits are the two critical factors that, in conjunction, determine the value of what is termed as regional capital.

Key words: social policy, decentralisation, regionalisation, coordination, self-governance, demographic changes, living standards

Introduction and background

Social policy has emerged, and is most often seen, as deliberate government intervention aimed at fostering formation and integrity of citizen community. This perspective has commonly led to excessive centralisation. At the same time, the extent to which a country's system of government is centralised bears significantly on the regions' ability to pursue their own social policies.

The papers seeks to present rationale for altering the social policy model in Poland by **devolving relevant powers to local and, notably, regional governments**, in a move enabling them to engage more broadly in social policy making beyond the administration of welfare programmes. Thus empowered, local governments could adopt an active role encompassing employment and re-employment support, education, and healthcare. The concept is primarily concerned with enhancing the effects of social policies and improving the quality of social institutions in regions.³ This seems particularly vital at a time of rapid civilisation advances, such those currently being experienced by societies and observable e.g. in the increasing role of services.

Another reason why it might make perfect sense to bring up the issue just now is that regional governments across Poland are at the moment busy developing their growth strategies for the decade to come. Arguably, social policy should have a more central place in these new strategies. The difficulty that they are clearly facing stem from the complexity of social problems and the poor availability of studies attempting to synthetically assess the overall outcomes of local governments' efforts in the social policy realm and their actual impact on regions' growth.

Rationale for social policy regionalisation

Following Poland's accession into the European Union, regional growth strategies have so far taken it for granted that improvements in the living standard would be immediately reflected in the societies' increased awareness of social policy priorities at the regional level. As a result, their prescriptions have been vague in addressing unique regional challenges. An examination of the social policy objectives inscribed in these

³ Poland's local government has been the object of a plethora of studies. While much of this literature does deal with social policy issues, it hardly takes notice of the inclusive and integrative nature of social services. A relatively broad treatment of social policy segments is offered by Prof. J. Hausner's 2013 report (Hausner, 2013).

documents reveals that they must have been cascaded from national- or EU-level goals rather than derived from an identification of specific regional needs.⁴ Consequently, performance targets and measures were either missing or unlinked to operationalised regional diversities. The latter were, therefore, not adopted as signposts for defining social development tracks based on the effective utilisation of both regional and European resources.

As the optimistic outlooks of the first decade of the 21st century have waned, social policy in Poland, alike in many other countries, seems to be experiencing a major transformation driven by, on the one hand, a discernible slowdown in social integration across the EU and, on the other, by an increasing role of social benefits in stimulating sustainable development at the national level. In Poland, this trend has recently gone hand in hand with changes in the labour market and, as from 2015, with a declining contribution of local governments to the implementation of social policy. It can be observed in the decreasing proportion of local funding in social expenditures, accompanied by an continued increase in centrally managed funds.⁵

This being said, it could be reminded that centralised, government operated distribution of social services has historically proven to lead to a decline in the society's economic activity, or even reducing people's engagement in local and regional community work.⁶ This is the case of the beneficiaries of social transfers, as well as of **taxpayers** who, understandably, might feel that the taxes they pay and the social security contributions they make disoblige them from social activity in the local or regional arena.

⁴ The entire issue no. 10 (2014) of *Polityka Społeczna* was devoted exclusively to "Regional Social Policy Strategies." It comprised 6 papers focusing primarily on the selection of planning and development tools for regional social policy making rather than on implementation and coordination aspects.

⁵ This trend is visible in the 2015 and 2018 Statistical Yearbook data on government revenues and expenditures (aggregated by level of government).

Significant changes in local government revenues relative to central government revenues can be captured: the steady growth of local governments' own revenue from 30.5% to 35.8% of central government revenue between 2005 and 2015 was followed by a decrease to 32.3% in 2017. Likewise, the local governments' share of state budget revenue was at 57.2% in 2005 and soared to 68.8% in 2015, only to drop to 65.7% in 2017. A somewhat different pattern is found in the contribution of local governments to overall social policy expenditure—it fluctuated from 49.9% in 2005 to 60.3% in 2010, 59.2% in 2015, and 57.1% in 2016, recovering to 61.3% in 2017. It should be noted that the contribution at the regional/provincial (*voivodeship*) level suffered the sharpest decline.

Looking at social expenditures by category, the most spectacular decrease in local government contribution is seen in spending on healthcare. Changes also affected the contribution of local governments to the financing of social and family benefits, as a result of a leap in central government spending addressed to family support, with new individual benefits to be distributed by local governments. Author's own calculations based on Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2015, pp. 648, 653–655; Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2018, pp. 653, 657–660.

⁶ A more in-depth treatment of this tremendously complex issue can be found in such works as: Steyaert, Hjorth, 2006, or Orczyk, 2018; the latter discussing the dire consequences of interwar Poland's post-1928 withdrawal from regional differentiation in social policy.

Although this paper will not explore this complex process in more depth, attention should be brought to its increasing linkage to differentiation in eligibility for social benefits and to taxpayer migration patterns. Indirectly, this condition can be traced back to changes in the labour market, notably to employment instability and the difficulty in securing a job that entitles one to work-related social benefits. Arguably, the changes are hence largely attributable to growing diversity in employer–employee relationships and work arrangements.⁷ Clearly enough, disparities in employment structures alone will not suffice to understand the process.

During a demographic low and in a low job security environment, retaining as much of the population in employment as possible must become the top priority for social policy at the regional level.

The services sector can be expected to continue to create jobs as long as flexibility in work arrangements is coupled with easy-to-access mechanisms for identifying and acquiring the requisite skills. That flexibility is conditional on regional and local governments' ability to influence employment relations by e.g. tampering with legality of work or employee and employer payoffs. What it involves is a substantial degree of autonomy in deciding to what extent social services can be a substitute for direct income support, and to what extent they should be linked to such income transfers.⁸

We are about to witness long-term changes in employment structures associated with robotisation. They will primarily affect jobs available to workers holding medium-level qualifications and belonging to the middle income group. Social policy catering to this group will therefore aim not so much to spur job seeking but to create opportunities for retraining or otherwise enhancing employability. Admittedly, it is a group of people who do want to get a job and sustain or better their standard of living. Albeit needed and helpful, social services alone will not eliminate the problem even at the best of times. The transactional costs related to structural changes in employment and qualifications will vary between regions and communities but will make a difference to perceptions on the viability of social benefits or policies implemented at the regional or local level.

Further, regionalised social policy cannot be oblivious of the need to attract and retain highly qualified workforce, whose presence is key to innovation capacity and is known to boost work efficiency, thereby helping upgrade the local living standard in the long run. Driving positive trends in the region's employment structure, high-grade workers promote its wealth and the wellbeing of its population. Social policy makers might therefore want

⁷ Cf. a series of journal papers published in *Polityka Społeczna*, e.g. issue no. 9 of 2012 entitled "Precariat" or issue no. 10 of 2014 entitled "Regional Social Policy Strategies", or Orczyk, 2017; Gałęcka-Burdziak, Gromadzki, 2018; Trochymiak, 2018. The authors bring attention to the excessive focus placed on aid components vis-à-vis e.g. support for re-employment.

⁸ This paper follows N. Barr (1993, pp. 97–99) in presuming that social benefits may take the form of monetary payments or the form of social services. Where the notion "social service" is used, it is implied that the benefit is non-financial in character or that its value cannot be easily rendered in monetary terms.

to consider applying such incentives as e.g. preferential loans to keep such labour force in the region.

Modern regionalism vs. social policy today

Deliberations over regional self-governance often discuss the experiences of such countries as Switzerland or Germany (Golinowska, 2018, pp. 62–71), where regionalisation is anchored in the historical and cultural heritage (federal states). Just recently, it has also surfaced, as part of a broader democratisation process, e.g. in Spain or Italy (the latter being somewhat volatile).

The experience of countries where social policy has been regionalised more widely demonstrates that the role of local governments in implementing social policy never ceases to evolve and that changes are in each case triggered by unique factors. Most changes involve adjustments to the proportions between centralised and regionalised benefits and the degree of coordination between them, while not affecting the overall number and amount of benefits available. This is because, when facing difficulties, local governments will be primarily concerned to prevent disruptions in the delivery of benefits (no matter who legislated their putting into effect). To make sure that the delivery is not discontinued, they will usually raise fees or claim additional funding from the central government. In other words, they do care about continuity of delivery and payments, as if eager to reinstate the legitimacy of electoral choices. In some countries, e.g. in Italy, changes to the framework occur more frequently and are due to political power shifts in regions (Bonoli et al., 2019, p. 69).

More and more Polish regionalism experts these days are highlighting changes that have occurred in the perception of regional growth factors. As far as economic factors are concerned, competitive edge is typically sought in what has been designated as the cumulative effect of innovations implemented (Gorzela, 2007, pp. 181–182). The effect can be recognised and described through multidimensional analysis of regional change dynamics. When conducted properly, such analysis helps better identify regional growth factors and capture their perception in a globalising world. This is precisely the approach that can be found in a recently published report on the findings of Paweł Churski and his research team (Churski et al., 2018, pp. 70–98).⁹ Importantly enough, the authors underscore changes in the external determinants of regional growth factors.

On thoroughly examining the impacts of each factor, the authors conclude that, while the catalogue of regional growth factors remains basically unchanged, **there have been major shifts in their impacts, hence their identification will have implications that are to be interpreted differently.** For example, the quantitative aspect of many factors should be now downplayed relatively to their qualitative aspect. In other words, qualitative attributes are increasingly significant in appraising the regions' competitive advantages.

⁹ The authors rigorously pinpoint the main aggregates discussed in the paper, specifying their content and describing their interconnections.

This is apparent e.g. in growing importance attached to human capital, social capital, or organisational and technological innovation, whose rootedness in networks contributes to leveraging the quality of a region's **territorial capital**.

These findings seem to provide sound justification for integral regionalisation, including that of the financial and institutional social policy settings.

Decentralisation—more autonomy, or more self-governance in social policy

The degree of regionalisation may vary between specific strands of social policy, being aligned to the perceived needs, values and potentials of a region's population as well as to the aspirations of its government. In other words, the extent of autonomy and self-governance is judged and regulated by the degree of independence from the central government (of the country of which a region is part) that a region exercises in making strategic and financial decisions.

There exist obvious links between regional self-governance and the degree to which a particular country's system of government is decentralised. Depending on that degree, local governments are allowed more or less autonomy in enacting social policy measures. Thus:

- 1) local initiatives may be subject to approval or corrective action at the national level, or
- 2) central governments may delineate the playing field for local governments, determining financial frameworks and procedures for the provision of social benefits.

In the former case, local authorities are given more autonomy in implementing the general objectives of social policy decreed at the national level; the central government may still choose to either support local projects or to force local officials to abandon or revise them. The latter case attempts to account for the specific needs of regions while ensuring that they remain within the confines of policies mandated by the superior authority.

Regional independence in social policy making may be exercised within different institutional frameworks. The options are as follows:

- Delegating powers to local governments to adopt whatever institutional solutions they deem better suited to providing certain benefits and services, e.g. working together with employers to build vocational education networks, or applying preferential treatment to certain categories of local taxpayers (domicile-based local fees and taxes).
- Empowering local governments to freely add social services/benefits and modify social packages available within the centrally established institutional framework, e.g. to resize government subsidies provided to existing schools, adjust the minimum wage, or regulate fees charged for certain services.
- Permitting local governments to make independent decisions on commissioning services from local businesses and organisations, thereby e.g. supporting specific forms of social enterprise or collaborating with employers in setting up vocational grant programs.

- Preserving, and at times supporting, the historical institutional settings for the provision of social benefits and services that are entrenched in some local and religious communities, e.g. nursing homes (these are already present, even if scarce).

Regional self-governance in social policy making may be also viewed through the lens of state intervention—its extent as well as the instruments used. In Poland, regulatory changes are mostly initiated and enacted at the national level, i.e. by the central government. This places rather rigid constraints on local governments, leaving them not so much room for independent decisions on what benefits and services are offered and how they are provided. Barr (1993) distinguished the following classes of approaches¹⁰:

1. Putting in place legislation to determine each citizen's eligibility for, and entitlement to, social benefits, while at same time permitting local governments to differentiate access based on certain criteria, e.g. giving preferences or restricting access to certain categories of taxpayers—residents of specific administrative units. This may be associated with prerogatives to create compulsory regional insurance plans, or to support or establish local banks, thus enabling local actors to e.g. influence certain strands of innovations and investments in the region (with the local government as a stakeholder or guarantor).
2. Secondly, a degree of latitude within strictly defined terms of reference may be vested in public institutions responsible for the conduct of social policy (which is where cooperation with voivodes, acting as central government representatives in regions/provinces, raises problems). This approach involves emphasis on increasing institutional flexibility and streamlining coordination between government offices at all levels, specifically those engaged in such areas as education, welfare, or healthcare services. What autonomy concerns in this context is not so much adjusting the number of services and benefits provided; instead, it corresponds to choosing or determining day-to-day running procedures, coordination and leadership structures, remuneration and accountability of managers, etc.
3. Subsidising—which is perhaps the most important of all the approaches discussed in this chapter given the amount of EU funding available to local governments (including funds allocated to labour market instruments). What could be accomplished is, however, better targeting financial support at certain types of services that are seen as compatible with the government's social policy objectives, yet are operated by non-governmental rather than government-run institutions and organisations. These services may include e.g. feeding programmes, senior care, additional or increased benefits addressed to adults with disabilities and impairments, etc.
4. Direct transfers, i.e. allowing individual and corporate taxpayers to determine the proportion of their tax that they wish to earmark for regional social objectives.

All of these methods have been known for a long time and are currently in use by central government, yet their role in supporting the development of local self-governance in Poland is grossly underrated.

¹⁰ The classification proposed in Barr (1993, pp. 97–99) was used.

Methods and approaches are correlated with modes of delivery, i.e. the way that social benefits and services are provided to beneficiaries. Polish efforts at decentralisation have traditionally focused on the delivery aspect, which, at least in theory, would potentially stand for better coordination at the regional level.

Institutional coordination at the regional level is what could arguably be seen as a fundamental weakness of Poland's centrally administered social policy model (Golinowska, Rysz-Kowalczyk, 2014, pp. 9–10). Recent surveys indicate that, as an aftermath of the prevalent centralising tendency in recent decades, many institutional efforts at the regional level have become isolationist and **autotomised**, and their coordination is lacking or deficient. Poor coordination in the healthcare sector or the absence of employment support instruments in the mainstream of welfare policy could serve as examples (Krzyszowski, Podkońska, 2019, pp. 225–244). Improvements in this respect would therefore result in instant gains in the **efficiency and productivity of social policy at the regional or local level**.

Improved coordination and flexible financing schemes would definitely help streamline the deployment of social policy instruments as well as reduce disparities in the delivery of some benefits across regions. Another benefit that is likely to arise could be seen in increased responsibility borne by local governments in supporting or funding a number of social activities.¹¹ After all, it should be emphasised that, under the existing social policy framework, regional self-governance hinges heavily on the size of allotments for social expenditure that a region can make **from its own revenues**.

Under the laws laying down the powers and responsibilities of governments at *gmina* (commune/municipality), *powiat* (district) and *voivodeship* (region/province) levels, Polish local governments already have certain legal possibilities to play an active role in the social policy domain. Nevertheless, their role with regard to social services and welfare benefits seems to be largely inadequate, limited to administrative functions, meaning that they are not supposed to do much more than applying the rules and procedures set out at the national level. The prevailing attitude is that of a local official fearing likely corruption charges (a behaviour traceable to known transparency deficiencies in the decision making process).

Increasing direct subsidies, on the other hand, even if not so prone to corruption and less demanding in organisational terms, has little effect on the quality of social services. It could be actually said that, instead, it **fuels the expansion of the private sector into the social services business**. Of course, this is not a case for limiting choices, but an argument for upgrading the quality of social services.

¹¹ That the coordination problem persisting at the regional level is discerned by many is demonstrated e.g. by the incorporation of institutional improvement as a standalone strategic objective into the draft Wielkopolska Region Development Strategy 2030 (*Strategia rozwoju województwa wielkopolskiego do 2030 roku*. Zarząd Województwa Wielkopolskiego, Poznań 2019. Available at: <https://www.umww.pl/attachments/article/59032/projekt%20Strategii%20Wielkopolska%202030.pdf> [access date: 20.08.2019]).

Opportunities and threats inherent in regionalisation of social policies

There is no doubt that further regionalisation of social policy is an extremely challenging issue and a very complex process (Zybała, 2014, pp. 168–169). This paper does not set out to opt for a radical reform toward regionalism in social policy. All that it does is **recommend making continued advances toward embracing regionalisation—based on a prior in-depth analysis of its costs and benefits¹²—as a move toward social reintegration in regions and local communities.**

It seems that, in Poland, experiments with regionalisation in the delivery of social benefits and services should be led by local governments. At the same time, however, it must be realised that any such attempts are sure to meet with a good deal of resistance and criticism¹³ coming from different angles and in varied forms of expression. It will most likely bring up equitable access to social services and welfare benefits as a fundamental civic right that regionalisation could encroach upon. But differentiation and discrimination do and will exist anyway, whatever laws and regulations we make. Given all the aspects and implications that regionalism has, this discussion probably cannot ever arrive at a definite conclusion. Instead, it should concentrate on the ways to minimise any inequalities that might arise at the regional or local level.¹⁴ Once the idea is fulfilled, central governments should join in, urging and leading the change rather than trying to contain the process under pretence of central reforms (e.g. the case of Upper-Silesian innovative patient records).

From an operational standpoint, regionalism will be criticised primarily by advocates of centralised government and of a similar approach to the practice of social policy. Whilst the actual phrasing may vary, the thrust will be on the diminution of powers that central authorities would suffer—most spectacularly, institutions entrusted with administration and oversight of social policy. Resistance against decentralisation will come from some political parties anticipating a loss of clout with certain voter groups.

(An attempt at) a summary

Poland is a unitary state. In such settings, regionalisation may take a variety of forms and may be embodied to a varying degree in different aspects of public life. In recent years, the trend in social policy has been for centralisation. However, regionalisation cannot be merely equated with efforts at stopping or reversing the centralising trend. For

¹² Being aware of the pitfalls and sticking points of restricting or modifying access to social benefits, it is advisable to set a time frame (effective and expiry dates) in each case—for the sake of clarity and simplicity in system design, implementation, and evaluation.

¹³ The strengths and weaknesses of active social policy are superbly portrayed in Rymśa, 2013. The author's comments on regionalism in social policy are just as valid today, with regionalisation corresponding to the fourth stage of social policy.

¹⁴ A more exhaustive discussion can be found in Dziewięcka-Bokun, 2015. The role of networks is depicted more broadly in Benkler, 2008. Manuel Castells, on the other hand, brings attention to effectiveness, transactions costs, and new types of social bonds (Castells, 2007, pp. 411–451).

one thing, it is an obvious necessity in a EU member country, and for another, it is a key that opens the gateway into the future era.

Increased autonomy of regions is contingent on establishing explicit rules for regional budget planning, based on per capita income in a given region and the contribution that the region's residents make to state budget. Once aware of these figures, local populations should be more inclined to insist on having a say in decisions bearing on the quality of life in the region, while regional and local authorities would be more confident and reasonable about their own budgets, seeing a point in linking local revenues to expenditure on certain social goals. This implies a substantially reduced role of central government subsidies in financing specific tasks. Obviously, central subsidies would still be there, but they would appear under a special budget section as grant-in-aid and would represent a much smaller proportion of local governments' social expenditure. And the central budget would still be able to support disfavoured or less thriving regions and undertake extraordinary or special-purpose initiatives.

The regional devolution process should set off from a resolve to let each region keep an increasing percentage of its PIT (personal income tax) and CIT (corporate income tax) revenue (as well as, prospectively, of property tax receipts, too¹⁵). It might be also plausible, in spite of certain controversy on social policy grounds, to guarantee a **minimum proportion of social expenditure** in local/regional government budgets. What algorithm would be applied to compute it ought to be decided by the central government. However, it would be up to local governments to determine the structure of that expenditure, possibly earmarking relatively more funds to certain high-priority social policy objectives.

Whatever endeavours are made at the national level, regional policy will continue to have some general characteristics and unique drivers, such as:

- Diverse demographics—with the spectacular case of the Opolskie region.
- The level and dynamics of per capita income and its effects on the employment rate and structure—as reflected in the proportion of people employed in the social services sector.
- Percentage of population in employment—particularly of senior population.
- Changes in employment rate associated with workforce mobility and net migration (i.e. the immigration and emigration balance).
- Changes in employment structure relating to investments, innovations, and the emergence of new occupations.

A sensitive question is which social policy decisions, particularly those regarding what services and benefits are offered and how they are delivered, would be made at the national level and which are to be made in regions. Since any such decision has financial, organisational and functional implications, the division of decision-making powers is indeed a formidable challenge and a process extremely susceptible to conflict. One way to approach the problem would be to commence an incremental and well-premeditated

¹⁵ The imminent introduction of cadastral tax (an *ad valorem* property tax) will have important economic and social implications for the regional development.

transfer of powers by allowing regions to take over—based on an identification of the available sources of central, regional, local and private funding—coordination of the different groups of benefits and services.¹⁶

As a further step, areas for collaboration should be delimited to avoid overlapping (duplication of funding) and to harvest synergy effects in public spending. Obviously, this can only be achieved where there is smooth cooperation between regional institutions and central agencies (branches) operating in the region.

Better coordination could bring immediate effects e.g. in regions experiencing shortage of labour, where vacancies could be filled by recent retirees.¹⁷ Where demand for workforce exceeds supply, shifts in retirement age may face some hireable seniors with the need to retrain for part-time jobs. The issue can only be resolved where basic coordination exists between parties, primarily between employment services and prospective employers. Access to part-time employment options should be opened e.g. for those providing care to persons with disabilities. Unless minor amendments are made to national legislation (on social insurance) redefining the employment category and educational prerequisites for this social group, this could only be done with a degree of coordination and an individualized approach—at the local level or, to a lesser extent, at the regional level.

In regionalisation lies a chance to develop a model that will effectively arrest the ongoing de-labourisation of social benefits, giving precedence to social services, specifically to education, healthcare, and social insurance. What the payment of benefits certainly does is stimulate consumption and create an illusion of free choice; what it does not do is improve the quality of life or tighten social ties. Widely practiced and known to be trouble-free in its organisational aspects, it is a form of assistance that incurs greatest hazards for the future prospects of nations and societies.

Globalization and the omnipresence of the Internet have transformed the concept of regionalism, making it more of a conscious choice made by a region's citizenry following an incentive to creatively engage in social constructivism, build prospective identities, and establish new social bonds that are no longer based solely on economic growth factors.¹⁸ **The question arises whether, and to what extent, regional governments and institutions will be able and willing to commit themselves to this newly revisited idea of regionalisation where social services will critically impact on the population's quality of life.** Understandably, outcomes will take longer to arrive than a single term in office. On the other hand, the alternative is even more unattractive: emigration and ensuing deterioration of the region, leading to its increasing dependence on national government or multinational corporations.

¹⁶ Stanisława Golinowska and Ewa Kocot contend that [direct translation from Polish]: "(...) satisfaction of society's needs, specifically of those needs that are critical to sustainability, will always involve clear and explicit assignment of responsibility, competent personnel, and seamless coordination in handling business on hand (...)" (Golinowska, Kocot, 2013, p. 256).

¹⁷ The issue was discussed in great extension in Nyce, Schieber, 2005, specifically in chapter 10 entitled "Aligning Retirement Policy with Labour Needs."

¹⁸ Recently the issue was competently tackled in Poniedziałek, 2018, pp. 68–69.

It is only through consistent commitment to further studying and investigating the effects of social policy projects conducted in regions that social policy can sustain its role as a discipline of science as well as a critical growth factor for regions and countries.

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Regionalizm w polityce społecznej w Polsce

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest wykazanie, że dalszy rozwój polityki społecznej w Polsce wymaga uwzględnienia regionalizacji zarówno w aspekcie poznawczym, jak i wdrożeniowym. Jest to powodowane wieloma czynnikami, tak zewnętrznymi, jak i — przede wszystkim — wewnętrznymi. Osiągnięty poziom życia i świadomości obywateli wymaga obecnie lepszej koordynacji działań instytucjonalnych oraz zwiększenia znaczenia władz regionalnych i dostosowania ich działań do preferencji mieszkańców regionu. Kwestią otwartą pozostaje charakter procesu zmian. Czy ma to być systemowa decentralizacja czy też autonomiczny rozwój inicjatyw i programów regionalnych i lokalnych wpływających na rozwiązania systemowe (zwłaszcza zaś na regulacje prawne)? W obu tych podejściach konieczne będzie zwiększenie samodzielności regionów w zakresie subsydiowania czy redystrybucji środków finansowych wspierających rozwój świadczeń, w tym zwłaszcza usług społecznych, a także ich lepszego dostosowania do potrzeb i możliwości ludności regionu. W przedstawionej koncepcji zmian polityki społecznej zakres i jakość świadczeń społecznych współdecydowały o wartości kapitału regionalnego.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka społeczna, decentralizacja, regionalizacja, koordynacja, samorządność, zmiany demograficzne, poziom życia