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**REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS
AND PROGRAMS IN POLAND.
CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES**

Abstract: The paper presents the current state of regional development planning systems. Based on the analyses of obligatory and non-obligatory regional plans and programs the author formulates a diagnosis showing the virtues and deficits of regional programming in 2011. The paper reviews the types of planning documents and describes the institutional infrastructure that is responsible for preparing, adopting and implementing regional goals, policies and operational tasks. This diagnosis provides a basis for reflection on the demands and challenges that the Polish regional planning system should cope with in the years ahead. Globalization processes, competitiveness of regions and territorialization of development policies make up the background to the challenges. The challenges themselves include processes such as integration of planning tools, public participation in programming processes, and – last but not least – standardization of document types, which should allow implementation of a coherent system of monitoring indicators that support evaluation of regional policies.

Key words: Regional development, strategic planning, regional planning system.

Introduction

Our current understanding of the notion of regional development is undergoing important changes. This phenomenon is reflected in national planning documents: in the *National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020. Regions, cities, rural areas (KSRR 2020 – Krajowa Strategia Rozwoju Regionalnego 2020. Regiony, miasta, obszary wiejskie)*, as well as in the *National Spatial Development Conception 2030 (KPZK 2030 – Koncepcja Przestrzennego Zagospodarowania Kraju 2030)*. However, regional and local planning systems do not seem to reflect current tendencies in planning, especially in relation to the territorialization of development policies. Based on the author's own analyses of obligatory and non-obligatory regional plans and programs, the paper presents a diagnosis and enumerates the virtues and deficits of regional programming in 2011. The author also describes challenges and

formulates recommendations reflecting the so-called “place-based approach” to territorial planning. Solutions suggested and recommended by the author will allow the relevant authorities to overcome identified deficits in the Polish planning system and to expand the ideas of development policy territorialization at the regional and local levels.

1. The regional and local planning system in Poland – the author’s own research

In 2011, the author prepared two expert opinions concerning the current state of and possible amendments to regional and local planning systems in Poland for the Polish Ministry of Regional Development. At both regional and local levels, both obligatory and non-obligatory plans and programs were emphasized. Obligatory plans are those which must be adopted by regional and local authorities as stipulated by Acts of Parliament. Non-obligatory plans are made and adopted by various authorities, mainly local governments, in order to improve the quality of territorial management. The key observations made in the author’s research are the following:

In 2011, the most important obligatory planning system at the regional level involved 36 documents. Five of them were elements of other plans – mainly of a strategic nature. As many as 23 plans and programs are worked out for the area within voivodeship boundaries. The regional authorities have to elaborate 13 strategic plans, including a spatial voivodeship plan. Other plans and programs are operational – mainly of a sectoral nature. This is precisely this aspect that makes the system non-compliant with current exigencies of territorialization of development policies. Documents are prepared for diversified time periods. The majority (14) are medium-term plans, while 13 plans/programs have no determined time periods (!). Among 36 regional plans, 24 documents include direct references to spatial management. This shows how important the spatial dimension of territorial planning is. In many cases the legislator imposes a requirement to co-ordinate intraregional development with the national policy while leaving internal harmonization of plans to the regional authorities. The legal acts define organizational conditions for preparing, adopting, implementing and monitoring regional plans and programs. The regional self-government is main actor responsible for 23 documents. There is practically no legal pressure to ensure deep, socially rooted public participation. Instead, we usually find recommendations for “informing” or “consulting” which can easily be reduced to mere formalities.

The author’s diagnosis of the regional planning system includes the following:

- a requirement for closer interrelation of socio-economic and spatial planning systems;

- the national (legal) acts focus on the connections between regional documents and national policies while charging self-governments with co-ordination of regional and local plans. This situation must change radically: operational-sectoral documents and integrated plans should be better interconnected as a part of regional development strategy or regional spatial (land use) plans;
- regional authorities prepare on their own initiative numerous plans and programs – mainly of operational nature. This demonstrates greater awareness of development processes requirements, but unfortunately this non-obligatory planning system is not free of the deficits described above;
- intraregional documents frequently overlap and are insufficiently linked with the regional development strategy [Noworól 2011a].

At the local level, the obligatory planning system includes 41 documents: 22 at the district (*powiat*) level and 19 prepared for the communities (*gmina*). Local planning documents are prepared for different time periods, but this important parameter is not defined in 19 cases. Local governments adopt 11 medium-term plans, 8 short-term and 3 long-term documents. Spatial dimension of planning is referred to in 27 out of 41 documents of plans and programs. Again, this shows how important the spatial aspect of development is. Similarly to the regional level the legislator does not impose multilevel co-ordination of plans and programs. This situation must urgently be addressed because the development policy should be cohesive at all governmental levels. Despite certain formal links between plans and programs, the overall shape of the obligatory local planning system does not seem to allow efficient management of development processes. This stems from two main features. The first deficit of the local planning system at the regional level consists in a weak linkage between socio-economic and spatial issues. Another important deficit consists in that there is no necessity to adopt local strategies in Poland. Thus, the majority of local plans and programs are operational and sectoral without a broad and cohesive reflection of the entirety of administrative unit problems. In the opinion of the author a territorially oriented local development strategy should be an obligatory element of the planning system. The expert opinion carried out in 2011 showed that the best governed Polish metropolises, districts and communes prepare local strategies as non-obligatory plans. Besides, the “smart” cities, districts and communes implement many other non-obligatory plans and programs. These documents are frequently strategically oriented. Revitalization (urban regeneration) programs, which in practice are of an integrated nature, are a good example of this. Revitalization programs reflect contemporary understanding of territorial development, combining sustainable, smart and inclusive aspects of territorial change. When describing the local planning system in Poland we must add that there is only loose coherence of regional and local solutions. This also should be urgently amended. As in the case of the regional level, public participation in local programming is more symbolic than real [Noworól 2011b].

2. Challenges for planning systems related to “a place-based approach”

The territorialization of development policy relates to the observation that, nowadays, “the efficiency of place-based production systems and their competitiveness are key factors for the producers to gain competitive advantages” [Markowski 2011, p. 76]. Based on the analysis of many authors [e.g.: Jewtuchowicz 2006; Novarina, Zepf 2009], Markowski is of the opinion that the territorial dimension of development policy is, among other things, the result of the need for conditions to be provided for effective co-operation of self-governments in order to stimulate development that crosses borders of administrative divisions at the national and international levels [Markowski 2011, p. 77].

A deep understanding of territorialization was presented in Barca’s well-known report: *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy. A Place-based Approach to Meeting European Union Challenges and Expectations*, published in April 2009 [Barca 2009]. The Barca Report stated that there was a consensus that the European Union should modernize its cohesion policy, tackling new challenges as follows: “The policy concept singled out in the Report is the place-based development approach, what the OECD calls the *new paradigm of regional policy*...”. Its objective is to reduce persistent inefficiency (underutilisation of resources resulting in income below potential in both the short and long-run) and persistent social exclusion (primarily, an excessive number of people below a given standard in terms of income and other features of well-being) in specific places. According to the Report, “places are defined through the policy process from a functional perspective as regions in which a set of conditions conducive to development apply more than they do in larger or smaller areas”. The Barca Report argued that a place might require an intervention from outside in response to two sets of market and government failures:

- a place can be trapped in a vicious circle of inefficiency or social exclusion because local elites intentionally fail to choose appropriate economic institutions (as it is against their interests), or
- the less a place has effective institutions, the less likely it is to have them in the future (path dependence) [Barca 2009, p. 11].

The essence of policy territorialization boils down to the fact that the goods and services concerned need to be tailored to places by eliciting and aggregating local preferences and knowledge and by taking account of linkages with other places. The place-based approach goes beyond the traditional dilemma of whether to decentralize or centralize public functions. The authorities governing exogenous interventions set down the priorities, rules and general objectives for using the funding provided, and leave it to lower levels of government to implement these principles according to the context as they see fit. Place-based policies are complex but they have brought spatial transparency into the public interventions. The spatial dimension of public interven-

tions is transparent, verifiable and subject to citizens' scrutiny and there is a clear recognition that "the state does not necessarily know best". Among the most evident weaknesses which indicate the need for reform of cohesion policy, the Barca Report mentions "a deficit in strategic planning and in developing the policy concept through the coherent adoption of a place-based, territorial perspective" [Barca 2009, p. 15].

Currently, the philosophy of "a place-based approach" is mentioned in many strategies and policies, including – among others – the key EU document "Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth", adopted by the European Commission in 2010. Among 3 main priorities, this strategy indicates "an inclusive growth", consisting in "fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion." [Europe 2020 2010, p. 11]. However, an overall analysis of the "Europe 2020 Strategy" induces to understand it as a demonstration of a non-spatial development attitude, rather representing traditional trends in the economy that are not related to the territorial dimension [Szlachta 2011, p. 27].

Territorial priorities for the development of the European Union have been adopted in the form of the so-called Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 (TA 2020), agreed at the Informal Ministerial Meeting of the Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development on May 19th, 2011 in Gödöllő, Hungary. The document lays down six territorial priorities for the EU which can contribute to a successful implementation of the *Europe 2020 Strategy*. These priorities are as follows:

1. Promote polycentric and balanced territorial development.
2. Encouraging integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions.
3. Territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions.
4. Ensuring global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies.
5. Improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities and enterprises.
6. Managing and connecting ecological, landscape and cultural values of regions [TA 2020 2010, p. 7-9].

The Territorial Agenda indicates the relevant governance and implementation mechanisms. TA 2020 underlines that "Implementation instruments and competencies are in the hands of EU institutions, Member States, regional and local authorities and private actors. Multi-Level Governance formats are required to manage different functional territories and to ensure balanced and co-ordinated contribution of local, regional, national and European actors in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity. Therefore, vertical and horizontal co-ordination between decision-making bodies at different levels and sector-related policies is needed to secure consistency and synergy." [TA 2020 2010, p. 9].

A place-based approach is present in the latest Polish national development documents. *National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020. Regions, Cities, Rural Areas* [KSRR 2020 2010] is the key development document outlining future socio-economic development processes in the period up to 2020. The adoption of

a new model of thinking concerning place-based development – stimulation of internal territorial potentials and strengthening mechanisms ensuring diffusion of development from stronger centers to entire regions – addresses the challenges that the current policy needs to face. The new regional policy is oriented towards all Polish regions and territories, as it focuses on their strong points and takes advantage of the opportunities, and provides external resources to level out development gaps where needed. [KSRR 2020 2010]. *National Spatial Development Conception 2030* [KPZK 2030 2011] is another national strategic document of the greatest importance. Since spatial management is a result of multi-level development processes, *KPZK 2030* uses the place-based approach to establish its goals and implementation instruments. The main idea still consists in territorially balanced development focused on the development potentials of the areas selected in the *EU 2020 Strategy*. The document outlines the complex but well-tailored concept of functional areas playing different roles in national, regional and local development.

In the context of planning tools, the territorialization of development policies is supported by a lot of research work dealing with the complexity of socio-economic and land-use development issues. It is especially noticeable in working papers and proceedings which suggest better integration of different types of planning systems [Korzeń 2004; Mączyńska 2008; Markowski 2010; Noworól 2007].

The exigency referred to above, imposed by a place-based approach to territorial development allow us to outline the challenges the Polish planning systems must cope with. It is worth quoting a well-designed system of planning instruments. Thus, when defining a planning system it is necessary to indicate:

- list of plans which are compulsory based on national acts;
- hierarchy of plans and their reciprocal linkages, pointing out a list of recommendations that are compulsory in the plans of a lower level;
- key areas or projects crucial for implementation of the territorial development policy;
- managerial levels or institutions that are committed to prepare and enact plans, including informative, consultative and participative procedures;
- the means of financing the preparation and consultation of plans;
- managerial levels or institutions that are committed to implement plans and their recommendations;
- managerial levels or institutions that are committed to monitor and control the implementation as well as the evaluation of plans' results;
- procedures and rules applicable for preparation, enacting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all types of plans [Noworól 2007, p. 95-96].

The main challenge in redefining the Polish regional and local planning system thus relates to the reciprocal position of socio-economic and spatial plans. As disclosed in the quoted analyses, prepared for the Ministry of Regional Development, there is no balance between these types of plans. The socio-economic documents are

rather sectorally oriented. A place-based approach is quite rarely observed in the newest documents. *Małopolska Voivodeship Development Strategy for years 2011-2020* is an example of implementation of this approach. On the other hand, the regional and local spatial plans focus on land use issues, whereas regional and local development

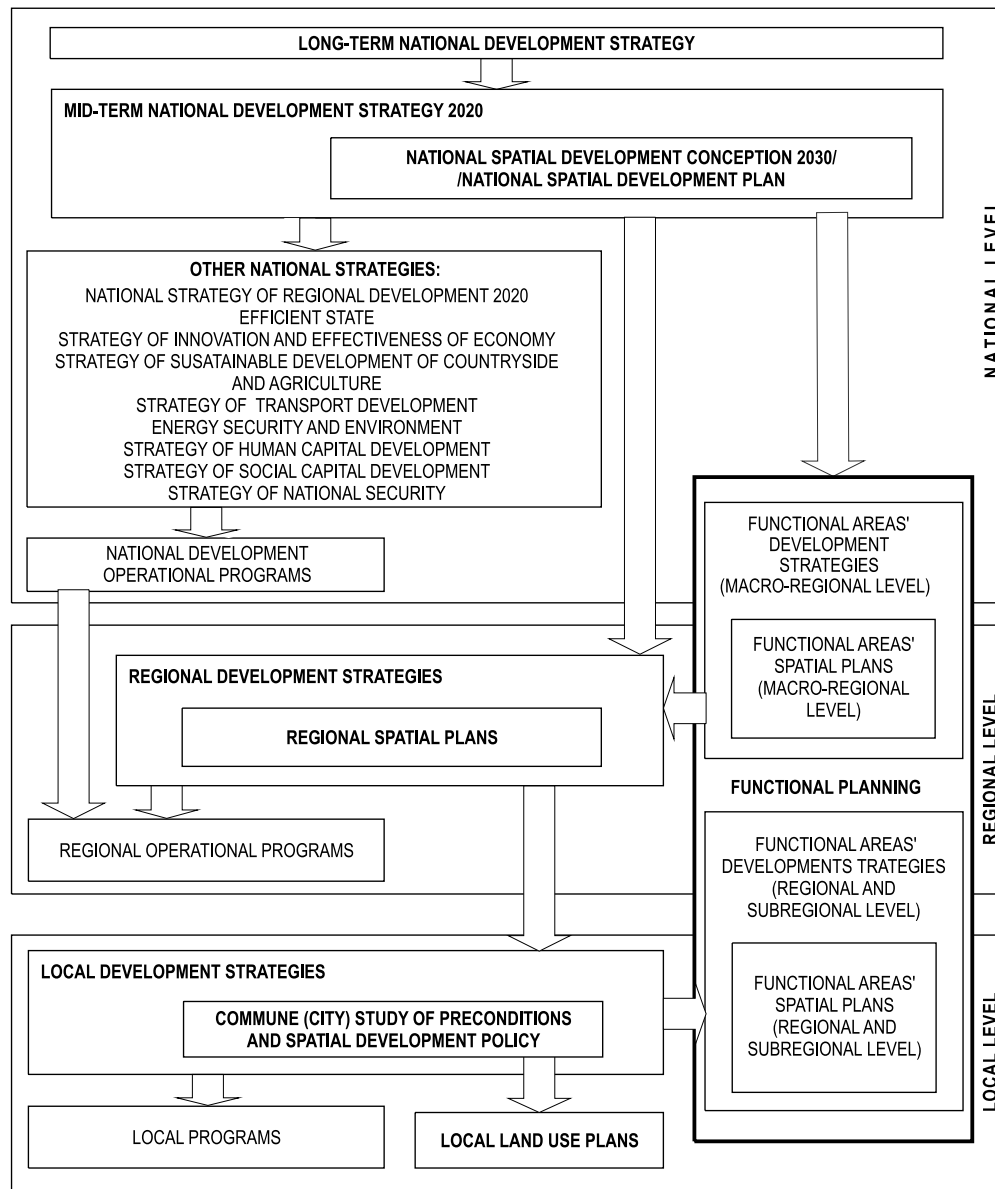


Figure 1. Target hierarchical planning system in Poland

Source: Own scheme based on *KSRR 2020* and *KPZK 2030*, p. 172 (mainly).

priorities expressed in strategic plans and operational programs are loosely referred to therein. The whole situation shows an important gap in the entire planning system.

In order to better co-ordinate plans and programs on the national level, the main documents regulating regional development processes have been adopted, *i.e.* *KSRR 2020* and *KPZK 2030*. A synthesis of the future hierarchical planning system based on the quoted national documents is presented in Figure 1.

Thus the “new regional policy” expressed in *KSRR 2020* and *KPZK 2030* requires important changes to be made at the regional and local levels.

3. Recommendations for regional and local planning systems

The two expert opinions prepared for the Ministry of Regional Development by the author in 2011 focused on the integration of planning systems in order to combine and to equilibrate various aspects of territorial development: environmental, economic, social and managerial. The author believes that taking into consideration the national concept of the new planning system is a must.

The author suggested that the concept should consist in integration and simplification of the existing extremely complex planning system. This simplification should be carried out in accordance with Ockham’s razor – a principle according to which the simplest explanation will be the most plausible until evidence is presented to prove it false. This principle is often summarized as follows: “there is no need to multiply unnecessary beings”¹. The Polish planning system is full of such types of “beings” which assume the form of numerous sectoral plans and programs.

The author’s main assumption for amendment of regional and local planning models consists in the statutory establishment of a system of compulsory plans and programs at all three self-government levels (region – district – community):

- an integrated regional or local development strategy adopted in parallel with the spatial (land use) plan, and
- an integrated regional or local operational program.

All the above listed documents should be internally structured in a way that reflects the three main goals of the *KSRR 2020*: competitiveness, coherence and efficiency. The basis for formulating the regional or local strategy should be an obligatory public debate, including public, corporate and non-governmental sectors. Such a debate has to go beyond informing (unidirectional transfer of information) and consultation (transfer of information with feedback) and achieve a level of real public participation, enhancing common deliberation concerning possible and acceptable future solutions. In the course of this difficult debate, a vision of the future state of a territory should

¹ William of Ockham (1285-1349).

be defined. Creation of a development vision characterized by two aspects is recommended: ideological (a record of thoughts and intentions) and spatial (visual representation). Thus, in a coherent and logical planning system the spatial aspect should have an important and horizontal role so as to allow managerial control of other elements of on-going activities and development of the territorial unit. The spatial aspect should

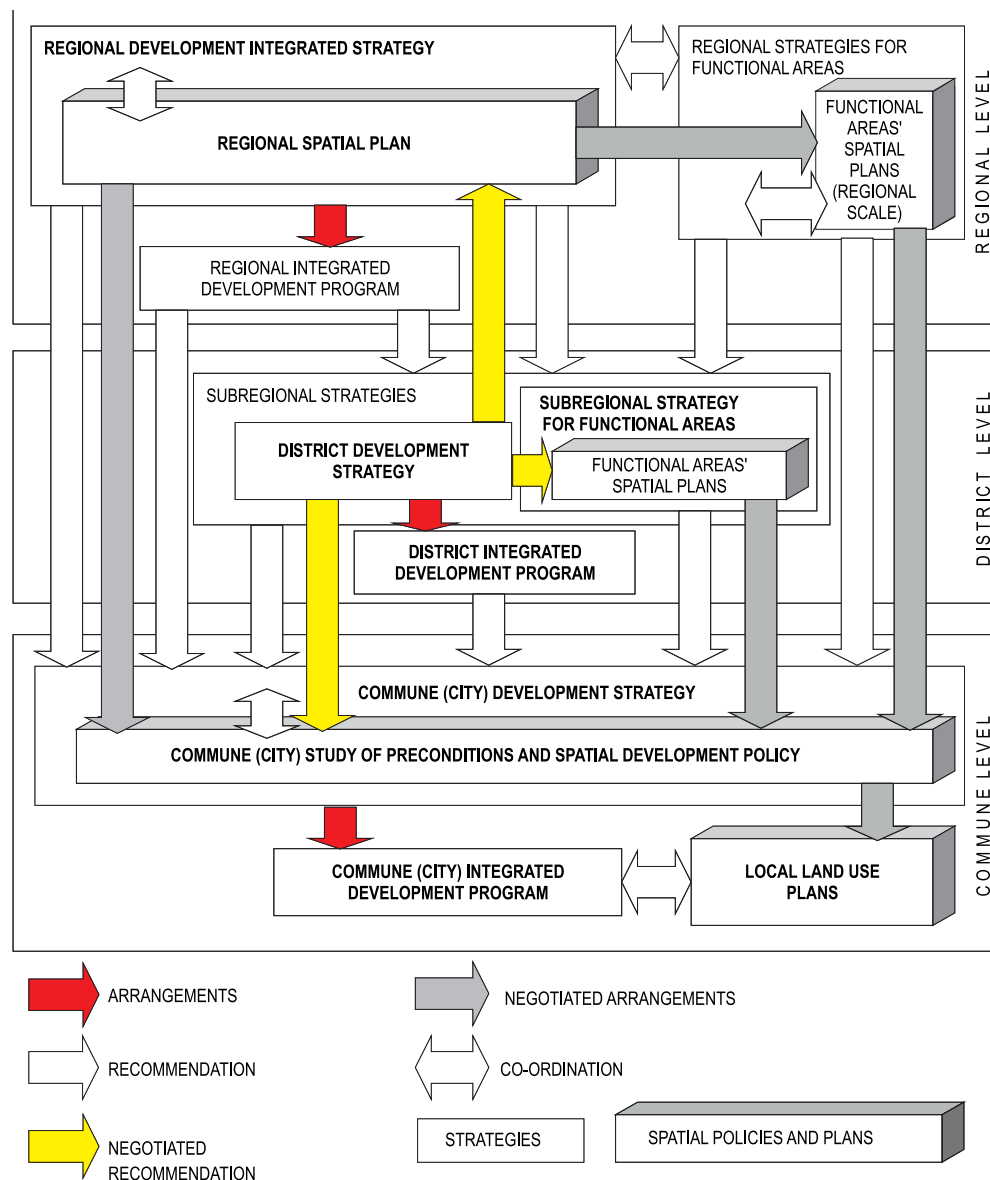


Figure 2. Co-ordination of regional and local planning systems

Source: Author's own study.

be organized similarly to the financial policy, for example, that affects other government activities. The author's proposals define a coherent system of reciprocal relations for all regional and sub-regional documents. These relations can be divided into three elements: arrangements (obligatory, binding decisions), recommendations (suggestions) and propositions of co-ordination. The expert opinions outline the close linkages of strategic and operational plans and programs with spatial (land use) documents at all planning levels.

It is important that the integrated planning system should also take into consideration that the territorial approach to development management cannot be limited to administrative boundaries. Thus, there is a place for an entirely new reflection on how – in terms of multilevel management principles [*e.g.* Agh 2010] – to find patterns of efficient planning. Therefore, the expert opinion at the local level outlines the structure and links of the sub-regional strategy of functional area development. This type of strategic document, together with the relevant operational and spatial land use plan, constitutes an important supplement, allowing development policies to be adapted to territorial requirements.

Another important suggested amendment to Polish planning systems is a unification of the inner structures of strategic and operational documents. The author recommends that strategic documents should be composed of a set of policies selected after an analysis of the existing compulsory and optional planning systems. The main goal of this type of unification would be the creation of a system allowing implementation of a range of indicators measuring the process of development. The overall system is presented in Figure 2.

The scheme presented in Figure 2 seems to be quite complicated. However, it is worth noting that the set of plans and projects presented above replaces a set of 77 documents, being currently obligatory in Polish regional and local planning systems. Another approx. 100 plans and programs are voted as optional in order to cope with the current challenges of territorial development.

Conclusions

- Figure 2 presents a set of compulsory plans and programs which are coherent with a new national system described in *KSRR 2020* and *KPZK 2030*.
- The relations between these plans and programs is clearly defined (arrangements, negotiated arrangements, recommendations, negotiated recommendations, co-ordination) according to the current legal assignments of Polish regions, districts and communes.
- Close linkages between the strategic and operational plans and programs and the spatial (land use) documents are established at all planning levels;

- The said linkages are of a structural nature, *i.e.* spatial documents are essential elements of strategies or they are prepared simultaneously by the co-operating planning teams.
- The regional and local planning systems include the strategies and spatial plans for functional areas of relevant levels (macro-regional, regional and sub-regional), allowing better structuring of place-based – territorial policies.
- The plans and programs are prepared and enacted by appropriate self-governments using a full range of instruments of public dialog: information, consultations and social participation.

The above list makes up the backbone of the suggested system. Once approved, it can be easily particularized with financial instruments, as well as with systems of monitoring, control and evaluation.

Provided the suggested systemic solutions can meet a wider acceptance, there is just one more requirement to ensure the efficiency of the described above changes in the Polish territorial planning system. This is indispensable courage that should be manifested by the national government responsible for enacting legal acts conditioning the implementation of the necessary amendments.

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