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IMPLEMENTATION SYSTEMS OF POLISH REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES – VALUATION WITH ELEMENTS OF COMPARISON ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract:

The article presents the conducted research and its results regarding correct construction of implementation procedures for Polish regional innovation strategies, prepared by regional self-governments in the period of 2003-2008. Its initial part discusses the accepted assumptions and key concepts. Next an exemplary valuation system was presented, i.e. the model of the above strategy implementation system. The main part of the article illustrates valuation results, as well as conclusions and recommendations related to establishing similar plans in the future.

Valuation area – assumptions and definitions

The valuation of systems for the implementation of Polish regional innovation strategies (RIS), presented in the hereby article and prepared by regional self-governments, in the period of 2003-2008, was performed by the author as part of the research project entitled “Innovation of European regional space vs. dynamics of economic development”, requested by the National Centre for Research and Development to be prepared by Wrocław University of Economics. In order to perform it a few assumptions had to be accepted. The first one was to assume that just like any strategy, RIS represents the concept of system oriented functioning, the objective of which is to obtain certain feasible targets, it is the way to accomplish certain tasks by using defined means at an entity’s or entities’ disposal, which are responsible for implementing it. Such perception of RIS allows for distinguishing its strategic part, i.e. objectives and tasks together with implementation procedures for carrying these tasks out, as well as an implementation part designed for the broadly understood organization of the whole process. The second assumption referred to meanings represented by the following concepts: RIS implementation, RIS implementation procedure and RIS implementation system. RIS implementation should be understood as the set of activities aiming at: obtaining the defined targets, including mainly the implementation of investment, servicing, financial, administrative, organizational and legislative projects covered by RIS; coordinating the realization of the above projects in time and space; monitoring such implementation and verifying the advancement of RIS targets’ accomplishment; monitoring and correcting activities aimed at organizing the implementation; updating the monitoring strategy and correcting it at due levels. As it may have been noticed, RIS implementation means not only achieving the target specified in it, but also the process of observation and modification of implementation procedure, as well as the strategy itself. Implementation procedure constitutes the derivative notion in relation to strategy implementation. Such procedure is based on the algorithm of activities as the

components of actual implementation steps. Having considered the above activities it seems founded to put forward the statement that it is a variable, self-adaptive algorithm opened to interference from an entity, or entities using it. Together with them, i.e. constituting and executive bodies of Polish regional self-government, its organizational units and partnerships, as well strategic cooperation partners, such as: other units of local authorities, business entities or non-governmental organizations, the RIS implementation system is established.

Valuation pattern

The valuation of RIS systems implementation required an exemplary model of such system to be constructed in order to perform comparisons. Obviously it refers to modelling by means of minimum components which should create such system. It was constructed, on the basis of analyzing professional literature [eg. 1-2], presenting the application of strategic plans by local authority units, studying the content of RIS implementation procedures in all regions and author's individual experiences obtained while establishing and implementing a few dozen strategies for local authority units. The mentioned above minimum for RIS implementation system is represented by: the entity responsible for the organization of strategy implementation process; the entity's tasks, i.e. functions related to strategy implementation; entities responsible for carrying out particular projects included in the strategy; possible changes in organization structure of self-government organizational units; possible changes in units' and self-government partnerships organizational structure; the roles of self-government constituting and executive bodies in the process of strategy implementation; the sources of financing tasks aimed at accomplishing targets defined by the strategy.

Valuation results, conclusions and recommendations

The analysis resulted in identifying numerous imperfections with regard to implementation procedures of Polish RIS. Among the most frequently encountered ones the following may be quoted: vague definition of functions to be taken up by the entity responsible for RIS implementation, coordination and total disregarding some of the important functions. Almost the same frequency was observed in the lack of designating specific entities responsible for particular tasks aimed at obtaining RIS objectives, as well as no financing sources specified. Less frequent mistakes referred to incorrect specification of roles performed by constituting and executive bodies of regional authorities in the process of RIS implementation, as well as the lack of information regarding indispensable changes in organizational structure, as well as all organizational units and partnerships in the region.

Research results can be analyzed in two ways. The first focuses on defining a complementary guideline, or modifying RIS implementation procedures by these components which were registered as missing or incorrect. However, is it exactly the right solution? The answer is rather negative. Such an easy and simple rectification of implementation procedures will not bring about any success. Their disadvantages do not result from unawareness of their executors, but from the way they perceive fundamental issues, such as: who constitutes the planning entity, who is appointed for carrying out the plan and what is its subject matter. Accepting a certain set of answers to the above questions decides about the fact whether establishing its implementation system is possible at all, and if so, what kind of form it should take. Therefore, research results

should be analyzed in another way, i.e. by studying possible combinations of RIS object-subject and their implementation consequences.

Polish administrative region may be observed as the unit of local self-government, i.e. a territorial corporation performing, according to legislator's directives, these tasks which were assigned to it. One may also accept the perspective in which it is a multilevel economic, social and environmental system, set within limits defined by law. In the second understanding it represents a much broader category than regional self-government structures and, in many cases, the category completely independent from them or dependent to a minor degree. Having considered the above, one may ask a question: What should become the subject of planning in RIS and who should be responsible for creating it? The following three variants of object-subject combination seem to provide possible answers:

1. these material and immaterial elements of a region which decide about the development of innovation and processes occurring between them, which are included in the practical range of self-government possible influence as RIS object and local authorities as its subject;
2. all material and immaterial elements of a region which decide about the development of innovation and processes occurring between them as the strategy object, and also the set of organizations, institutions, enterprises, individuals etc., exerting significant influence on them as its subject,
3. these material and immaterial elements of a region which decide about the development of innovation and processes occurring between them, which are covered by self-government competencies and its cooperating partners as the strategy object, and also self-government authorities and their partners playing the role of its subjects.

The first combination is based on the following logic. Since, according to RIS accepting resolution issued by regional parliament, the board is obliged to perform its decisions, therefore it should include only these tasks which are covered by their joined competencies. Otherwise, the strategy subject, represented in this variant by regional authorities, will not be able to influence, in any way, its implementation, or such influence will be insignificant. Who, therefore, is supposed to implement it? How to assess the accomplishment of targets set in RIS? Why construct RIS, if no influence can be exerted on its realization or it is significantly limited? Having accepted this standpoint it is hard to find answers to the above questions. Such RIS could have a precisely specified implementation system, the institutional components of which will take the form of organizational units and regional self-government partnerships. The implementation procedure itself could be very detailed, since as a whole it would be covered by a cohesive and presenting certain internal hierarchy self-government system.

In the second case we deal with a broad perception of RIS. It is observed as a homogenous plan of non-homogenous activities performed by an exceptionally numerous group of regional actors. This concept refers to collective strategy, and at the same time a network oriented and dispersed one which, as such, should be constructed and carried out by the whole set of due subjects. However, a question occurs whether in view of these subjects' big number, diversity and changeability it is possible to prepare and realize such strategy at all. Even if the answer is positive, the level of complications connected with its implementation system would turn out enormous. The collective

author of such RIS may, in fact, create its diagnostic and planning part, however, the implementation phase would definitely have to be, at the most, very general.

The final combination consists in a synthesis of two previous ones. Regional self-government constitutes its leading, planning entity, which simultaneously plays the role of the main RIS implementing agent, its initiator, coordinator and supporting source, for a limited number of its partners responsible for RIS co-creating and co-implementing. These partners are represented by subjects who, in a formal way, have decided to participate in planning and co-executing particular projects covered by RIS. According to such concept RIS is not unnecessarily and exclusively limited to the area of regional self-government structure, since it uses the potential of independent entities, which are extremely important for the development of innovation. At the same time, in the whole system, there appears a visible leader – the main subject responsible for implementing RIS – regional self-government which, as such, not only occupies prime position in the construction of implementation procedure but, above all, realizes it both independently and in the form of formal cooperation with specified partners.

According to the author the third combination seems most favourable, however, RIS is dominated by the logic of the second option. Even if it is not as explicit, as it has been presented above, still its influence is well visible. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that implementation systems of the studied RIS still leave a lot to be desired. It happens, because in the philosophy of strictly collective plan realization, they cannot be different. Hence, in order for the chance to occur that a practically applicable implementation system could be constructed, the concept of planning itself has to be changed – either into the one characterized in the first combination, which is just satisfactory, or the one discussed in the third combination, which seems an optimum solution in the conflict between the ideal concept of implementing all pro-innovative potential and real life conditions.

It should also be emphasized that the content of official RIS documents was assessed too. Additional information indicates that in many cases the practice of RIS implementation is not compatible with its content. As the result of current decisions there are created new structures of both formal and informal nature. Besides there are also prepared internal documents providing more details or describing implementation procedures. What is more, some of the regions have already prepared new documents which, at present, represent the status of projects or materials similar to an innovative foresight. As it has been discussed, self-government reality “imposes”, on Polish regional authorities, the need to keep improving both RIS as such, and also their implementation procedures.

Final remarks

In general terms, RIS valuation represents the first step aiming at the construction of strong, Polish regional innovation systems and, within their framework, regional innovation supporting systems. This is a difficult step and, as the performed analysis points out, rarely free of mistakes. Therefore, it has to be regarded as an important one and the desired manifestation of intra-regional oriented policy. The following steps, mainly consisting in preparing new RIS, should be free from the described implementation disadvantages. It, obviously, does not have to be performed according to some homogenous and generally accepted model. There are many ways for organizing implementation systems. However, they should always be designed in the

way which would prevent strategic objectives from being just the wishful and desired ones, but bring them into the area of realistically achievable and the achieved ones.

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