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**PROGRAMMING THE DEVELOPMENT  
AT THE TERRITORIAL LEVEL IN POLAND.  
AUTHOR'S OPINIONS  
WITH A FOCUS ON WEAKNESSES**

**Abstract:** The subject of this article is to present the author's evaluation of regional planning practices in Poland. Special focus is placed on chosen links of strategic programming. The author discusses those elements of the programming process which can be defined differently, but which at the same time are decisive for the quality of the program. It concerns the stage of diagnostic research, as well as strategic selection and the implementation system. The discussion of these issues is preceded by a short characteristic of the legal background for the functioning of Polish local governments and their planning activities.

**Key words:** Regional planning, regional policy, strategic planning, practice of programming in Poland.

**1. Purpose and scope of the study  
and the applied terminology**

The purpose of the article is to present the key practical issues of programming the development of territorial units in Poland, with a focus on strengths and weaknesses of the process of designing the relevant programmes. The opinion is based on the author's experience in offering expert assistance in the programming of the development of territorial units at the local and regional level. The scope of the analyses and evaluation is out of necessity adjusted to the form of article. Only selected issues of the programming practice will be taken into consideration. The presented issues may be classified into two main categories:

- 1) Main stages of the programming process.
- 2) Compliance of the actions taken with the established standards of the programme design process.

Both the programming stages and the standards pertaining to the programme design process are based on the author's opinions presented in the latter part of the article.

There are three remarks that need to be made in connection with the presented characteristics:

- 1) The phrase “programming the development of territorial units” refers to units that constitute separate entities, *i.e.* those that are governed by regional or local authorities (in Poland this pertains to NUTS-2, NUTS-4 and NUTS-5 level units).
- 2) The evaluation of the programming process will be based on generalized findings concerning territorial units of all levels, as defined above.
- 3) The discussion will be confined to strategic programmes, *i.e.* programmes that – generally speaking – meet the following criteria:
  - a) the intervention process selectively applies to the main factors that determine the development of a given territorial unit, but at the same time the main directions of intervention are defined;
  - b) long-term projections of development are formulated;
  - c) their assumptions and main findings are widely consulted with the representatives of regional and local political, social and economic communities, and non-governmental organisations;
  - d) they form the basis for more detailed operational programmes aimed at promoting socio-economic, ecological and spatial development.

A number of issues concerning the applied terminology need to be addressed. First of all, no distinction between “programming” and “planning” is generally made in the Polish planning practice. These two terms may thus be used interchangeably. Second, instead of “national development program (plan)” the term “development strategy” might be used for the sake of brevity. Third, the terms “regional-level units” and “local-level units” are used throughout the article. In Poland, NUTS-2 (voivodeships) constitute the regional level, while NUTS-4 (poviats) and NUTS-5 (gminas) form the local level. Fourth, the limited scope of the article does not allow to make observations on programming development separately for regional- and local-level units. More general terms, *i.e.* “territorial units” or even “units”, will therefore be used. Last but not least, we assume that a development programme is an integral element of the development policy and an instrument used to accomplish its main goals. As such it confirms that development policy is one of the mechanisms of intervention based on anticipation. The actions taken and the decisions made as part of the intervention are aimed at producing the desired results in the future.

## **2. Administrative and legal bases for programming the development at the territorial level in Poland**

In Poland there are five levels of units that are classified according to the Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS), but only three of them are governed by elected local authorities: NUTS-5 (gminas), NUTS-4 (poviats), and NUTS-2 (voivode-

ships). In the Polish model of local government, lower-level units are independent in legal terms from higher-level units. They choose their own policy that they follow on their own account. They are governed by local authorities, whose legislative body (municipal council, regional council) is elected by universal ballot<sup>1</sup>. At the level of NUTS-2 (voivodeship) there is an additional, decentralized body representing the central government, *i.e.* the Voivode designated by the Prime Minister. The powers of a Voivode are not extensive, and are limited to those matters related to the government administration in the voivodeship that are not reserved exclusively for the regional government.

The legal framework for the development policy, including programming, is provided mainly by the legislation on local government, with separate legal acts for each level: NUTS-5 (gmina), NUTS-4 (powiat), and NUTS-2 (voivodeship). They define the powers and responsibilities of the relevant bodies, while at the same time providing the legal basis for development policy. While they do not in essence enforce the adoption of development programmes (including strategic programmes), they do include an obligation to pursue an efficient development policy, without specifying its tools.

The second important type of a legal act of high importance for the model of programming the development of territorial units is the Act of 6 December 2006 on the principles of the development policy. It specifies the obligations of the national-level government, including those pertaining to planning activity. With regard to local government (territorial-level) units, the Act stipulates what may be considered as recommendations on the types of programmes and co-operation between the different levels. The rules governing external financial support for projects of high priority for higher-level authorities are also specified.

One of the crucial documents for programming the development of territorial units is the *National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020*. It focuses on the role of central government and imposes an explicit obligation on the government to perform specific actions. However, the Strategy also provides important foundations for formulating the development programmes to be implemented by the territorial-level units. Since it defines the central government's priorities with respect to regional development and the rules for supporting local government, especially financially, it provides important guidelines in the "race" for success.

### **3. Prevalence of traditional approach in development programming**

A strategic development programme may be formulated based on one of two methodological approaches<sup>2</sup>, namely:

<sup>1</sup> In the case of the NUTS-5, the executive body is also elected by universal ballot.

<sup>2</sup> What is observed in practice is almost always a mixed model, although usually with a predominant contribution of one approach.

- a traditional approach,
- an approach based on idealized models.

The first of these approaches is based on reasoning referring to the possibility of “improving” the current state of affairs. Generally speaking, the formulation of a particular strategy is preceded by a meticulous retrospective analysis of development processes in a given period, the conclusions of which may be used to determine the necessary, but at the same time feasible, scope of intervention. In this case the diagnostic stage is decisive for planned development directions. The predominant action is searching for determinants of the observed development processes, and then analyzing the possibility of reinforcing their impact. In the second approach, the starting point is not the analysis of an existing system, but the creation of a desirable conception of the investigated reality (*i.e.* the formulation of a set of relevant objectives) that could exist in ideal conditions (*i.e.* in the absence of any internal or external constraints). The subsequent stage involves the elimination of the most idealized assumptions of the model (programme) to achieve a model where the proposed objectives may be achieved in appropriately defined, favourable conditions. In this case the process of designing a programme involves a chain of conditional reasoning of the type *if condition X is met, then Y is possible*, which transforms the concept based on an idealized model into the concept reflecting the current situation of a given territorial unit.

Instead of presenting an extended discussion of the above-described issues and the advantages and disadvantages of the two methodological approaches, at this point we would only like to emphasize that the first approach prevails. Important reasons for predominance of this approach include the following:

- under the first approach it is easier to argue in favour of the proposed development objectives and areas of intervention,
- extensive knowledge of the development processes taking place in a given territorial unit and of the programming technique is not the only prerequisite for using the idealized model approach; in order to propose the paths of development that are perceived as “revolutionary”, the entity involved in planning must also exhibit courage or even some creative imagination.

While the important merits of the idealized model approach are not to be denied, the traditional approach will serve as the reference in the subsequent part of the discussion. This is because the prevalent programming model applied in Poland is based on this approach. This implies that the first stage and the factual basis for the formulation of a strategy is the diagnosis of the current development of a given territorial unit.

#### **4. Formulating strategic development programmes**

The process of formulating a strategic development programme will be discussed in the following four stages:

- a) diagnostic stage,
- b) strategic choice stage,
- c) consultations within the community,
- d) designing the implementation system.

#### 4.1. Diagnosis of socio-economic, ecological and spatial situation

The main function of diagnosis is to interpret the observed reality. It is often considered to be one of the easier stages of the programming process. This is due to the fact that such analyses concern existing phenomena (either present or past), which may be identified with relatively good accuracy. There are, however, a number of pitfalls connected to the function of the diagnosis in the programming process as a whole. In other words, the diagnosis must be adapted to the objectives in terms of both its form and its characteristics. Most of all, it must be targeted, *i.e.* must focus on those fragments of the analyzed reality that are relevant for projections made for the future (the principle of selection is described further on).

The diagnosis is the starting point for formulating a development programme for a territorial unit. It should help identify the factors and determinants of development and the significant processes of transformations that reveal certain regularities. It performs a clearly subordinate role in relation to the other stages of the programme, especially with regard to the projection of objectives and areas of intervention. Several important issues affecting the usefulness of diagnosis are worth mentioning at this point:

- 1) When discussing determinants in general it is absolutely crucial to differentiate between the conditions and factors influencing development. The basis for this classification is the extent to which these determinants may be controlled by the main entity that pursues the development policy which at the same time is the entity responsible for the designed development strategy. The conditions of development cannot be controlled by this entity, as opposed to factors. It should also be noted that “controllability” (or “uncontrollability”) is also dependent on the time-frame in which the entity pursuing the policy (be it regional or local policy) undertakes to carry out certain interventions. For example, things that may be controlled (*i.e.* modified) in the long term may not be possible to control over a short time span (*i.e.* spatial development). The necessity to differentiate between factors and conditions<sup>3</sup> is related to the fact that the formulation of a given development programme requires first of all the planning of the **areas of intervention**<sup>4</sup>. It is precisely through

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<sup>3</sup> The presented division does not explicitly include the development barriers category. It should be noted, however, that the barrier may be either a condition of development or its factor. This is why it was not deemed absolutely necessary to discuss it separately (although it does appear in subsequent parts of the present article).

<sup>4</sup> Area of intervention: obligations that may be fulfilled by taking specific actions.

- factors that the entity pursuing the programme may influence the development processes (areas of intervention). Conditions, on the other hand, form the limits of the intervention and determine the scope (“depth”, “force”) of its effects.
- 2) A diagnosis conducted to aid the formulation of a given development programme should meet certain criteria defined in the general term “strategic diagnosis”.
    - a) The first implication is that the areas to be diagnosed must be carefully selected. An error that is often made – and observed even in some national-level programmes – is the lack of sufficient reflection on the objectives of the diagnosis. This almost immediately leads to inconsistency between the diagnosis and the subsequent stages of the programme. The diagnosis should be limited to earlier selected areas. In strategic programmes this pertains to the main drivers of development, *i.e.* those that had thus far been spurring the development of a given territorial unit or those that should be activated in the assumed time-frame.
    - b) Second, the diagnosis should focus on the identification of the regularities and processes of development, since they might be helpful in planning the necessary and acceptable areas and scopes of intervention. A static description restricted to the existing situation significantly reduced the usefulness of the diagnosis.
    - c) Finally, a strategic diagnosis also includes the so-called “prognostic diagnosis”<sup>5</sup>. Having determined the past development trends in carefully selected individual areas, it seems necessary to analyse the consequences of development processes if they proceed in line with earlier observer regularities. The prognostic diagnosis is thus a set of hypotheses that answer the following questions: *what would happen if – given similar conditions – no additional actions (interventions) were taken in the assumed time-frame?* Without a prognostic diagnosis, development programming becomes a “blind search” for the right directions of development.

The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis should be discussed separately. Since the essence of the analysis is well-known, only some of its aspects will be discussed, with an emphasis on those that are often ignored in practice. In the presented methodical approach the SWOT analysis performs an extremely important function; namely, it links the diagnostic and the projection part of the programme. However, it requires three important prerequisites to occur first:

- 1) The findings of the SWOT analysis must be supported by the presented diagnostic characterizations (descriptions)<sup>6</sup>.
- 2) The findings of the SWOT analysis should clearly outline the limits (*i.e.* more significant conditions) of development and the potential areas of intervention (*i.e.* more significant factors).

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<sup>5</sup> Prognostic diagnosis: the observation of a fact arising from inevitable trends or from the lack of an opposing policy (simple extrapolation).

<sup>6</sup> The SWOT analysis should be a generalization of diagnostic accounts. It may, however, refer to diagnostic descriptions made for other purposes than the formulated development programme. In such cases the sources of particular conclusions should be included.

- 3) The SWOT analysis must present at the very least an outline of the hierarchy of importance of conditions and factors.

Frequent errors made when presenting the results of the SWOT analysis also include:

- 1) An inappropriate selection of the presented strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- 2) Confusing strengths with opportunities and weaknesses with threats. The observations reveal that the most common reason for this is the lack of a clear definition of the criteria of classification. These criteria should allow to unambiguously distinguish those features that are classified as opportunities and threats from strengths and weaknesses, respectively. There are two criteria that may be used for this purpose:
  - a) The weaknesses and strengths of a territorial unit are related to the internal conditions within a territorial unit, while opportunities and threats arise from the characteristics of its environment,
  - b) The weaknesses and strengths of a territorial unit stem from the properties that the unit already exhibits, whereas opportunities and threats are related to anticipated features.

#### 4.2. Strategic choice stage

The development strategy, unlike many other indicative projections, is usually intended to be a tool for management of the development of a territorial unit (gmina, powiat or voivodeship). There at least two fundamental properties of such a programme:

- 1) apart from the intended (desired) objectives of development, the measures ensuring the accomplishment of those objectives must also be clearly defined,
- 2) the entity that is to carry out the programme must be specified; it must have the necessary instruments to address the challenges defined in the programme, and at the same time be able to carry out effective and efficient interventions.

The above-mentioned properties have important implications for the structure of the programme and the interrelations between its elements:

- 1) “**Objectives of development**” constituting a desirable concept of the reality under consideration within a given time-frame, which is most often possible to attain provided that certain conditions are met. They have usually been referred to using a very general term “**vision of development**”<sup>7</sup>. This most general concept may be disaggregated into more detailed objectives of development, which in strategic projections should usually focus on the appropriately selected pillars of development (*i.e.* drivers of development), and are referred to as “**strategic objectives of development**”. One of the related terms is the often used term “**directions of**

<sup>7</sup> The vision of development is a concise concept of the development of a given territorial unit; it focuses on the most important and desirable features of its development.



**development**”, which includes some dynamic elements. The term “**priorities of development**” is also worth noting. However, the use of this term requires a clear outline of the hierarchy of identified objectives of development based on their significance. Furthermore, the objectives of development need to be analysed in a hierarchical structure reflected by a dendrogram<sup>8</sup>:

***vision of development ⇒ strategic objectives potentially ⇒ further detailed levels***

For the analysis of the elements of the programme to be complete, it is necessary to at least mention the prognostic diagnosis of the likely long-term scenarios of possible changes. It is especially important to put sufficient emphasis on the external conditions, both the existing ones and those that may emerge in the time-frame of the formulated programme. Together with the evaluation of the current socio-economic situation, these conditions should determine the selection of the aforementioned objectives of the development of a territorial unit.

- 2) The planned “objectives of development” must entail the determination of areas of intervention, *i.e.* measures ensuring the accomplishment of assumed objectives. The terminology used to denote these basic elements of every intervention varies. “**Areas of intervention**” or, occasionally, “**policy objectives**”, seem to be the most universal terms, since they denote an active stance on the part of the entity involved. As in the case of objectives of development, the dendrogram is also useful for describing this group of elements of a planning document. At the top of the dendrogram there is the most general statement of actions to be taken, often referred to as the “**mission of development**”<sup>9</sup>. The lower levels include “**strategic objectives of policy**”, and, subsequently, “**operational objectives**”.

Another basic element that must be included in the planning document includes tools of the programme implementation. This category can be extremely broad, since the more specific tasks (the lower level of the dendrogram representing objectives) perform a subordinate function with respect to more complex projects. It should be strongly emphasized, however, that the authorities can only accomplish a limited number of the planned priorities directly, using their own resources. They must therefore have tools allowing to “persuade” other entities to act in line with their priorities. This should constitute the main criterion for identifying the relevant “instruments”. Therefore, there are phenomena in the development strategies of territorial units that

<sup>8</sup> The dendrogram representing objectives is a graphical representation of the structure of development objectives or areas of intervention, in which subsequent levels of hierarchy are formed by the appropriate dissection of higher-level objectives (areas of intervention).

<sup>9</sup> This notion is closely related to the vision of development. In fact, they are often used interchangeably, which may be the source of ambiguity. Taking this into consideration, it is worth emphasizing that, as implied by the etymology of “mission”, the notion should be interpreted in the context of the appropriate authorities. The mission presented in the development plan should therefore account for the role that is to be played by the main entity featured in the programme, *i.e.* the local government, with regard to the objectives of development of a given unit.



perform an exclusively subordinate role. This category includes financial resources, institutional tools, legal frameworks, and the impact of investment.

Summing up, in terms of function, the development strategy should address the followings:

- a) The most important objectives, arranged according to the appropriate hierarchy and specifying **what the system, for which the strategy is being developed, should achieve** in the assumed time-frame (the strategic nature of the programme requires observance of the principle of selection).
- b) Priorities: the **directions** on which the entities implementing the plan intend to focus when implementing the assumed development objectives; they should be carefully selected and arranged according their relative significance (urgency).
- c) Instruments: the means or processes for accomplishment of the objectives.
- d) Entities: this point addresses the question of who is responsible for taking actions aimed at achieving the agreed priorities, and, more generally speaking, who should be identified when evaluating the effectiveness of the implemented programme.

Frequent errors at the strategic choice stage under discussion include:

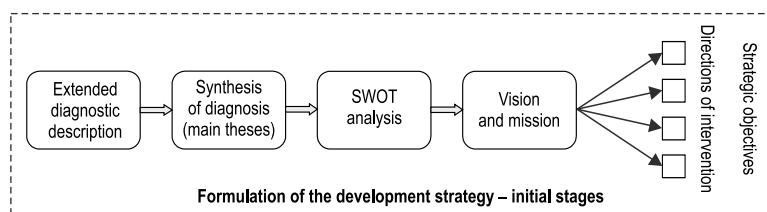
- 1) The commissioning of the entire work on this stage to external teams of experts. Strategic choices are by definition political choices that must be made by the given local authorities after appropriate consultations within the community. Therefore, the external teams should only prepare the substantive grounds for making the relevant decisions. Unfortunately, even though such cases are less frequent, the entire process of elaborating development strategies is still sometimes commissioned to external entities at the local level.
- 2) An excessively detailed structure of the objectives of development, which in effect undermines the strategic nature of the “product”. This is the result of pressure from various social groups or lobbying organizations. The reasons may be manifold, *e.g.* the desire to satisfy everyone’s expectations and the resulting self-imposed limitation of the functions of the formulated strategy, the weak position of the authorities in the political structures of a given territorial unit, or the limited negotiation skills of the teams preparing the projects.
- 3) Insufficient cohesion between the structure of the planned development objectives and the results of diagnostic analyses. This concerns in particular the relationship between the findings of the SWOT analysis and the declared directions of development.
- 4) A much more serious shortcoming, which in fact might be considered an error, is the mixing of the elements from the structure of the objectives of development with the elements of the objectives of development policy. The first group consists of real processes, while the latter refers to regulatory processes. This is most often visible in a dendrogram presented in a given document, when the elements of both groups are be found at the same level.

- 5) The lack of sufficient cohesion between the intended desirable state of affairs, and the documented capacities. The disproportion between what a given unit would like to achieve and the evidence of its capacity to achieve its objectives is observed particularly often in the local-level strategies.

As a result of the above shortcomings, the usefulness of a strategy as a development management tool is low. Unfortunately, this is often the consequence of the approach adopted from the very outset. For example, an authority may need a strategy in the form of a document in order to apply for external funding. In such a case the wish to complete the document in as short a time as possible and a sort of “laziness”, rather than focus on quality and usefulness, may govern the actions taken.

### 4.3. Public consultation and negotiations in partner teams

The above-discussed work on the development strategy of territorial units may be divided into several stages, with the final result being a vision along with a set of strategic objectives and a mission along with the directions of intervention. These initial stages are illustrated on the diagram presented below.



These stages may be summarized as follows:

- 1) The diagnosis as the initial stage of the work on the development strategy of a given territorial unit. This is most often an extensive analytical description that presents the previously selected areas of the economic base of a unit. This subject has been discussed earlier in the article.
- 2) A synthesis of the diagnostic description is then prepared in the form of theses and findings listing the conditions and factors that are essential for the mid-term and long-term development of the unit, and the prerequisites for their activation. This synthesis is usually drawn up for the purposes of the document presenting the strategy and constitutes its separate part.
- 3) The two previous stages form the basis for the SWOT analysis, which links the diagnostic and the projection part of the strategy. The latter consists of the vision and mission together with the appropriately structured objectives of development and interventions.

With regard to the above, it is worth noting that the diagnosis often implies many possible variants of the structure of strategic objectives, as well as directions of interventions. This leads to the conclusion that the variant which best corresponds

to both “*what the unit has*” and, on the other hand, to “*what the unit can and should achieve*” in the long-term. Unfortunately, this does not provide a sufficient basis for making the right choice. It should be emphasized that the strategic objectives proposed based on the diagnosis are only hypothetical. Although they are, in fact, based on the current state of development, they require political approval by the relevant local government. Apart from the conclusions stemming from the diagnosis, political choices must also take into account the preferences of entities that are important from the perspective of the development of a given territorial unit (e.g. economic organizations, lower-level local government units). The aims of these entities do not always coincide with the development priorities of the entire unit.

The package of strategic objectives proposed in the course of the diagnosis should therefore be treated merely as a starting point for broader discussions concerning the projection part of the strategy. These discussions constitute the stage of consultations and negotiations, which is very important for the quality of the entire endeavour. The issue of negotiations is related to the properties of the system that does not include a hierarchy based on subordination. When formulating a development strategy, the local authorities of a territorial unit cannot make decisions governing the actions of other entities. Therefore, in such a system consultations and negotiations are the main components of a mechanism that links the territorial unit’s more general objectives of development with the more operational objectives of economic organizations and the objectives of lower-level territorial units. The main reason why the practical application of negotiations in the management of the development of territorial units remains limited is the continuous underestimation of the so-called “soft” instruments of influence, including mainly the information flow. In the broadest sense, negotiations are a specific form of information exchange. One of the consequences of insufficient use of negotiations as a form of and instrument for the management of development in territorial units is the low degree of co-ordination of actions between various entities (partners) at the regional (local) level, which leads to poor effectiveness of the adopted programmes.

#### 4.4. Designing the implementation system

Relatively common weaknesses of the formulated development strategies are most evident in their part related to implementation. Although this is due to a number of reasons, the lack of sufficient determination to consistently carry out the plans seems to be the main factor. It is often a consequence of the deliberately limited functions of the programme. For example, the formulation of a strategic programme may be a means to obtain external funding for development. It may also be undertaken in order to improve the image of the unit in the external environment, or the image of the authorities in the eyes of the voters. In such cases the strategy may only perform its functions in a very short time-frame, since the failure to take necessary actions quickly renders both the enacted visions and the obligations they entail out of date.

Two issues will be addressed with regard to the stage under discussion, namely the monitoring subsystem and the institutional/organizational form of managing the implementation of a strategy.

**Monitoring** essentially involves the systematic collection and analysis of reliable information on the progress in implementing the projects planned under a given development programme of a territorial unit. Its main purpose is to verify whether the programme is being carried out according to the relevant, earlier approved guidelines. It is rather obvious that without an appropriately designed system for verifying whether the planned objectives are achieved it is impossible to determine whether the main premises of the programme are still valid. Thus the more or less costly act of designing the programme may be rendered useless quite soon. It is therefore crucial to monitor the above-mentioned relation between the premises and the actual effects. In a narrow sense, the monitoring concerns only the progress in accomplishing the relevant tasks; in a broader sense (the proposed approach) monitoring also involves the prognostic diagnosis of external conditions. This implies that in order to effectively manage the implementation of a strategy (including its operational programmes) it is necessary to apply appropriately designed procedures of collecting, updating, analyzing and evaluating the data concerning the implemented projects. This is indispensable for:

- reviewing the implementation of the strategy and the planning of new or complementary directions of actions to be taken;
- the remedial actions with regard to a project that is not being implemented correctly, or the termination (as a last resort) of a project that is likely to fail;
- the elaboration of a report on the projects in progress and completed projects.

The efficiency of the implementation mechanism depends also on the functioning of the institutional/organizational elements of the development programme. This pertains mainly to the appropriately organized logistics base of the programming process<sup>10</sup>. This is related to an appropriately organized system for the management of the programme's implementation. One of the potential and recommended solutions with respect to strategic programmes is a significant contribution of a specialist, professional institution (*e.g.* a foundation for the development of a given territorial unit)

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<sup>10</sup> The role of the information network in the framework of a partnership in support of a strategy should be emphasized. Networks of co-operation in the following groups of institutions are especially important:

- a) non-governmental and parapublic organizations within the business community, *i.e.* mostly agencies and foundations for regional development operating at the regional or local level,
- b) institutions dealing with innovation processes: research and development centres, universities, institutions serving as intermediaries in the transfer of technology,
- c) financial institutions that are desirable, yet hard to establish in the current conditions, regional guarantee funds, investment funds,
- d) relevant committees at the regional level (steering committee, evaluation committee).

to the management process. Important management-related tasks may be delegated to such an institution for the following reasons<sup>11</sup>:

- The actions taken in the process of the strategy implementation may be secured professionally. This pertains to the monitoring of implementation progress, continuous repetition of the prognostic diagnosis, drawing the drafts introducing changes to the provisions of the programme in line with the results obtained during monitoring and prognostic diagnosis, as well as maintaining relations in the framework of the partnership and the organization of consultations and negotiations. The local authorities, in turn, should ensure that they have significant influence over the activities of this institution, *e.g.* by becoming the main sponsor (shareholder).
- It allows to avoid the negative consequences of the rotation of local authorities due to the expiration of tenures. While rotation is obviously an important feature of every democracy (in Poland elections are held every four years), the observations demonstrate that it may have a destructive impact on the consistency with which the provisions of a programme are implemented by the local government. This is most noticeable when the attention of politicians is focused on the election calendar and the scheduled long-term strategies are neglected. Another example is the constant rewriting of the development strategy every time new local authorities are elected.
- Such an institution may become an extremely important platform for integrating the partnership in support of the programme's implementation. This is the case when the main partners of the local government become the sponsors (shareholders) of the institution in question.

The arguments presented above are valid only when the strategic development programme of a given territorial unit is a political consensus between the local (regional) elites. Otherwise, *i.e.* when the strategy may be attributed solely to those who are in power at a given moment, this justification no longer applies.

### Concluding remarks

Polish local governments have already gained considerable experience in development, and in particular strategic development, programming. The view that it is necessary for them to use long-term plans of development is becoming increasingly popular. This does not, however, always translate into a good development strategy, or, more importantly, one that is being pursued. The fact that having a strategy is

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<sup>11</sup> This does not imply the delegation of responsibility for achieving success to the institution in question. The local government remains responsible for implementing the strategy and the development of the territorial unit. The said institution only serves as one of the components of logistic tools used in the development management.

not enough to be successful and that the main problem is the consistent, long-term focus of efforts to achieve the adopted objectives is not always sufficiently understood. In fact, the adoption of a strategy by the entities involved must be considered as their self-discipline in making such choices in the present that bring them closer to overcoming the challenges that await in the future. The most common sources of weakness of development strategies are deliberately limited functions of the adopted programmes, which restrict their role to that of instruments creating a positive image of the territorial unit, and thus improving their prospects of obtaining funds.