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EU Funds for the Polish Countryside and Agriculture

Zawalińska, K. 2009, *Instrumenty i efekty wsparcia Unii Europejskiej dla Regionalnego Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich* [*The Instruments and Effects of EU Support for the Regional Development of Rural Areas in Poland*]. Warsaw: The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences, pp. 369.

Attempting to deal with the relatively new topic of the influence of Poland's accession to the EU on the development of rural areas is indeed a challenge. The majority of those who have so far made this attempt concentrated on presenting rather general data concerning the size and ways of allocating EU subsidies aimed at the countryside and agriculture, without going into much detail, that is showing their influence on the development process to this important segment of the social and economic life of our country.

The topic of Katarzyna Zawalińska's book is this desired and complicated aspect of the evaluation of the realisation of EU support programmes, that is to say (...) *analysing the instruments and effects of EU support for the development of rural areas in Poland, including regional aspects* (p. 13), resulting from all the financial operations between 2004 and 2006, both within the framework of the Development Plan of Rural Areas and in the Sectoral Operational Programme "The Restructuring and modernisation of the food sector and development of rural areas". In her work the author treats the gathering of funds as development instruments of a pro-egalitarian or pro-efficient nature, presenting the changes taking place under their influence in both agriculture and in all areas of the economy, and also analysing regional differences in acquiring and expending them, converting them directly into the development of the voivodships...

The first chapter presents the theoretical and practical aspects of development of rural areas from the beginning of the 21st century. On the one hand, it shows the countryside as a power base for towns, a type of mainstay

to which people migrate in order to find rest or acquire health food. On the other hand, it is a place of intense socio-economic change, in a widening range of stimulated principles of sustained development.

The next part deals with reflections on the different meaning of subsidies and investments in rural areas as well as selected assignments, carried out in Poland in the early post-accession period, dividing them into the pro-egalitarian and pro-efficient. Zawalińska points out the significance of the evaluation process (p. 135), which should provide information about: the effectiveness, competence, accuracy, usefulness, cost-effectiveness, durability, adequacy and quality of participation and awareness of the beneficiaries of the project; it should also define its actual effects. They are usually associated with a reply to certain fundamental questions: was the problem really solved at the time and place of the realisation of the programme, or was it simply postponed (the relocation effect); how did funds which were directed to one sector of the economy or a specific group of people positively affect others (the multiplication effect); how did financial help influence the level of competitiveness of institutions and groups which applied for it (the effect of substitution); did it lead to their reciprocal influence and how did it contribute to achieving the planned result (the synergy effect).

The third chapter is a presentation of the technical (methodological and methodical) foundations of the book, in which the RegPOL model which was adopted from Finland was used in Poland for the first time. It is innovative in that it enables the comparison and bringing down to a common denominator the results so far acquired through various methods, both quantitatively and qualitatively, as well as from many other sources. The first group (quantitative) used by Zawalińska included the results of on-line questionnaire research, carried out among the employees of regional centres of the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARMA); the second (qualitative) included numerous documents – starting from analyses on EU legislation, through documents concerning support programmes, to using training materials for the employees of Agricultural Consultancy Centres. Data was also acquired from other sources: ARMA, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Central Statistics Office. Some of the data (e.g. concerning the inter-branch flow in the entire economy, stimulated by EU funds directed to the countryside and agriculture) underwent a special study. The multidimensional research procedure which allowed for the presentation of previously unknown problem areas and the portrayal of the regional differentiation of rural areas in Poland, was reinforced by the way in which

the results were presented. The wealth of charts, tables, diagrams and maps divided into voivodships, assists access to information which is sometimes very complicated.

In the next two parts of her work the author presents the results of her own research, mainly concentrating on the evaluation of economic results of EU funds allocated to the Polish countryside, seen from various perspectives: economic growth, consumption and income, foreign trade, prices, employment as well as the overall regional development prospect. She shows how despite the fact that Poland's poorer voivodships received more EU funding than their richer counterparts, which had a direct and generally positive influence on the pace and scope of change taking place there, however, they brought greater effects in those which Bański (2009: 55) describes as areas with a significant endogenic development potential, determining access to further levels of development of rural areas. Zawalińska also made a financial evaluation, pointing out that subsidies were more beneficial than direct money transfers which were in many cases spent on consumer goods. It appeared that in the majority of voivodships the most effective funds were those supporting the development of the infrastructure whereas those directed at human capital were slightly less so.

Inter-branch analyses also allowed for capturing many multiplication indicators which were the effect of an increased transfer of funds directed at agriculture in particular. Its recapitalisation also stimulates other areas of the economy, which manifests itself in the growing percentage of the rural population finding work in local industry and the construction business. The author does however point to the lack of directions of change when analysing migratory movements or shrinking unemployment. Positive, yet minimal changes (1.5%) took place in the rate of GDP, export and consumption.

Generally between 2004 and 2006 rural and agricultural areas benefited from EU funds far more than urban ones, although the following question remains relevant: how should rural and agricultural areas be steered so as to lessen the significance of agriculture in the Polish economy and improve the possibility of employing the rural population?

In answer to this important question Zawalińska suggests introducing a few changes in the directions and principles of transferring EU funds to rural areas so as improve the efficiency of development tasks.

Firstly, Poland should move away from *contributing towards rural areas to investing in them* (p. 237). Merely subsidising some of the costs of the undertaken initiatives generally activates both local governments and private

individuals into making a greater effort and being more careful in acquiring additional capital while also encouraging greater rationality in spending the received funds.

Secondly, it is essential to simplify the administrative procedures in acquiring funding. Experience shows that the greater the subsidies the more difficult and longer the bureaucratic procedure which restricts the number of applicants. It would be advisable to correct the ways of acquiring EU funding in future editions of the Development Plan of Rural Areas and also to support fewer projects with greater resources, which will in turn lead to greater economic benefits.

Thirdly, it appeared that the larger the number of projects financed by the EU budget the fewer resources eventually reach the beneficiaries, because they are largely used up by administrative costs.

Fourthly, Zawalińska has several doubts as regards the accuracy of criteria for distribution of EU money. The authorities should continue working on the improvement of their allocation, both at regional level and at that of individual beneficiaries.

Fifthly, since one of the most difficult tasks of the rural development policy areas is investment which influences changes in the employment structure of the population leaving agriculture, programmes enabling the diversification of sources of income should be given even greater support, however maintaining adequate proportions between the more and less developed areas.

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Katarzyna Zawalińska's book is the first Polish attempt at a complex evaluation of the consequences of incorporating EU funds into the Polish countryside and Polish agriculture – a quantitative-qualitative evaluation, highlighting the reasons and value of the effect resulting from the applied support instruments (Olejniczak and Ferry 2008) – and formulating proposals for future years of realising the Development Programme of Rural Areas. The indicators used by the author are generally of an economic nature – changes in the values of GDP and Gross Regional Product etc. – and scarcely reflect social changes. It would be advisable for future research to include so-called soft development indicators, also portraying the quality of life in the countryside, the opportunity of getting to know the inhabitants' individual opinions, and consequently acquire a view of social progress which has taken place in the rural areas of our country after EU accession. Although the author indicates

that these issues go beyond the framework of her study, there is no doubt that she has also built solid foundations for research in which EU funds are considered as instrumental values, in other words simply a means to the realisation of autotelic values, objectified in the process of evening out the conditions and quality of life in rural areas.

References

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