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SOME REMARKS ON CO-OPERATION OF CITIES AND COHESION OF MULTIPOLAR METROPOLITAN AREAS IN POLAND

Abstract: To accelerate economic growth and strengthen the competitiveness of Polish economy, it is essential to develop strong functional ties between urban agglomerations lying close to each other and to create polycentric metropolitan systems, which would allow more effective use of resources and cosolidation of actions. The co-operating metropolitan centres forming a multipolar system increase their growth potential and strengthen their position in the network of world metropolises. The paper discusses advantages and determinants of such co-operation as well as organizational and functional links between the cities creating an integrated metropolitan system. Multipolar co-operation results not only in rational spatial policy in areas of mutual influences but also in improvement of the population's quality of life, improved transport infrastructure and better management in crisis situations. But the short-term individual interests must be replaced by a long-term vision of partnership-based co-operation of cities within an integrated multipolar area.

Key words: Metropolitan areas, spatial policy, territorial cohesion.

Introduction

Defining a *metropolitan area* – often referred to as a metropolitan region – in the morphological sense is not easy. *Metropolitan region* is usually defined as a complex, spatially continuous urban settlement system (comprising separate administrative units) which includes at least one large city (metropolis) and the surrounding, functionally related set of settlement units forming an urbanized zone (metropolitan zone). The metropolitan zone performs functions supplementary to the core (cores) of the metropolitan area – a city (cities) having the metropolitan status [*cf. e.g.* Gontarski 1973; Ziółkowski 1965]. A metropolitan area as a whole should create conditions favourable to the development of metropolitan functions.

Main characteristics of thus defined metropolitan area are [*cf.* Markowski, Marszał 2006, p.15]:

- territorial range embracing a zone of considerable direct daily influence (places of work and residence) and areas with development potential;
- metropolisation processes and sufficient presence of activities supplementing (substituting) the metropolitan functions of the the core city;
- high level of functional integration (strong functional links);
- well developed transport network.

Metropolisation processes taking place in urban regions are mainly characterised by [cf. Bassand, Kubler 2001, p.1]:

- spreading of urbanisation to suburban and rural areas;
- social and functional fragmentation;
- high spatial mobility of population and businesses;
- local cosmopolitanism.

Metropolitan regions understood as urban settlement systems distinguished by strong functional integration and well developed infrastructural network are among the key elements that strengthen Poland's position on the economic map of contemporary Europe [Markowski, Marszał 2007, p.15].

1. The context of territorial cohesion

Metropolitan regions exist independently of territorial administrative divisions. Boundaries of administrative regions, provinces and even states often cut across metropolitan areas. A metropolitan area can be regarded as overlying the existing administrative divisions [Kuźnik 2004, p. 66]. Metropolitan areas consisting of units under jurisdiction of different local authorities are usually characterised by considerable internal diversity in terms of the function, social structure and spatial development, which is determined by specific demographic and social conditions, access to infrastructure, local entrepreneurship, effectiveness of local government, and external factors [Marszał 2005, p. 57].

The definition of a metropolita area implies its cohesion, which is conditioned by the existence of social, economic and technological linkages (economic links being of primary importance). The principal aim of the cohesion policy is reduction and elimination of developmental inequalities and the resulting territorial disparities. Advancement of cohesion has a local as well as regional dimension. It involves creation and development of spatial structures conducive to the strengthening of the competitiveness of regions, cities or metropolitan areas, based on durable ability for quick adaptation to the changing environment: scientific and technological progress, consumption patterns, regulatory context, *etc.* [Marszał, Pielesiak 2008, p. 182].

The effects of metropolisation in Poland are limited to large cities and their immediate neighbourhoods, while in the encompassing areas occur phenomenon known as depletion of resources [cf. Korenik 2004, p. 3; Węclawowicz *et al.* 2002, pp.101-100].

A poorly developed network of technical infrastructure, the transport network in particular, is not favourable to spatial deconcentration of metropolitan functions across the entire metropolitan area, as is natural in developed metropolitan regions.

Cohesion-oriented development of metropolitan areas should aim at reduction of differences in infrastructure provision as well as elimination of inequalities in living conditions and chances for progress. At the same time, it is important to ensure the right to diversity, especially with regard to the natural and cultural heritage (the question of apparent conflict between cohesion and diversity is addressed by [Grosse 2008, p. 27]. Territorial cohesion should be viewed not so much as convergence (increasing similarity of static states), but rather in functional and dynamic terms, as the possibility of interaction between the constituent elements of an entirety [cf. Gorzelak 2007].

Absence (or scarcity and inadequacy) of those elements of development which determine the cohesion of all areas formally included in a metropolitan area results in limited possibility of development of activities specific to metropolisation processes. Effective inter-municipality co-operation provides a stimulus for positive changes in this respect, while lack or weakness of such co-operation impedes realisation of joint infrastructural projects designed to strengthen internal cohesion of a metropolitan area [Marszał, Pielesiak 2008, p. 195]. Co-operation is a particularly important condition of creating cohesion in the case of multipolar metropolitan regions.

2. Co-operation between metropolitan cities in polycentric metropolitan areas formation

To speed up economic growth and improvement of living conditions and to strengthen the competitiveness of Polish economy at the international scene, it is essential:

- to develop strong functional ties between urban agglomerations (metropolises) lying close to each other;
- filling metropolitan areas with attractive functions and forms of development.

Achievement of this goal can be fulfilled by creating polycentric metropolitan systems, which – by creating better conditions for macroeconomic growth through more effective use of resources and consolidation of actions – also improve the competitiveness of the constituent parts of such an area in relation to other metropolitan areas. The co-operating metropolitan centres forming a multipolar system increase their growth potential and strengthen their position in the network of world metropolises. Considering Poland's interest, this is particularly important in view of the growing role and importance of large urban agglomerations in spatial organization of integrated Europe, progressing globalisation and competitive advantage of many foreign metropolises.

This kind of co-operation among cities within a metropolitan area requires clear definition of integrating factors and common goals, suited to the needs and possibilities of the partners. Collaboration should be based on a few basic foundations: institutional co-operation, transport integration and functional co-ordination.

Co-operation between neighbouring metropolitan centres cannot, however, consist only in creating ties between these centres – it is essential to perceive co-operation as the resultant of spatial relations occurring between functional areas of these centres. Co-operation is likely to be successful and bring tangible benefits if it is based on creation of an integrated, multipolar metropolitan area, in which the system of links will encompass small and medium-sized centres and locations within the zone of interaction (inter-agglomeration zone, *cf.* Kuciński 2003, pp. 81-84). Such metropolitan co-operation – thanks to cumulative effects of development – is an effective answer to competitive pressure from other, stronger metropolises.

A multipolar metropolitan area has a specific structural pattern consisting of the following elements:

- neighbouring metropolises;
- connecting transport corridors;
- sphere of strong influence of core cities;
- remaining areas being under dominant influence of one of the metropolitan centres.

Within the above described structure of a metropolitan area operate business entities performing different functions [*cf.* Ziolo 2003, p. 38-39]:

- leading entities with exogenous functions, fulfilling important roles in international or national division of labour;
- entities with complementary functions co-operating with leading companies; they operate on supraregional markets and serve the needs of leading companies;
- entities with endogenous functions satisfying the needs of local consumers within the metropolitan area.

Analysis of the literature of the subject shows that multipolar metropolitan areas are believed to possess greater polarisation ability and more favourable conditions for the development of metropolitan functions. Within multipolar systems the zone of overlapping influences of core cities offers especially favourable conditions for location of business activity.

However, the process of creating a multipolar metropolitan area, benefiting the development of co-operating metropolises, should not build their dominant position at the expense of other centres and territorial units making up the metropolitan area, especially in the situation when there is a marked tendency to locate business activity in zones encompassing large cities because of opportunities for cost reductions (lower cost of labour and land, infrastructure accessibility, *etc.*). This process should favour external expansion of a metropolitan area as a whole, strengthen its openness and competitiveness, and stimulate creation of links with global economy. In this way

new growth impulses appear and positive transformations in the entire urban system are taking place.

3. Advantages and determinants of co-operation

Multipolar systems can emerge in situations of geographical proximity of strong urban centres, but not less important than the physical distance are the time distance and economic distance as well as proximity resulting from tradition and cultural heritage. An essential condition for development of a polycentric system is sufficient “gravitational potential” of the neighbouring centres, which depends on the distance between them and their economic and geographical potentials. Other necessary conditions include:

- a possibly high degree of complementarity of socio-economic structures of the co-operating metropolises;
- willingness and ability to co-ordinate the policy of entities making up a multipolar system.

Co-operation of cities within a metropolitan area can bring many benefits, but to achieve this a number of barriers must be overcome.

A major threat is inclination of cities to irrational competition between them, e.g. in respect of attracting investors and strategic investments, or reducing the effects of negative demographic processes at the expense of the other metropolis.

Effective co-operation between cities can also be hampered by political factors – there is always the question of how long the collaboration initiated or promoted by representatives of the same political party will last in case of potential changes in local authorities. Experience from Polish political scene is not very positive in this respect. It can, however, be optimistically assumed that social interest will be placed above the collective party interest, or co-operation will develop on such a large scale and in so many dimensions that personal (political) changes in local authorities will not be able to impede the integration process.

There may also be complications in a situation where a multipolar system is not a balanced system in the sense of asymmetry in the demographic, economic and social potentials of the metropolitan centres. It is disputable whether the existence of such asymmetry is a positive or negative determinant – on the one hand it may be a threat to co-operation on equal terms, but on the other it can be a chance for building a system in which the constitutive elements are complementary to each other rather than competitive. The imbalance in a multipolar system requires a sensible approach to developing co-operation, especially on the part of the dominating centre, so as to avoid anticipation of taking advantage of the stronger position. It is therefore essential to take care that the relationship being created is based on partnership, which requires a vision of long-term benefits deriving from the collaborative arrangement.

There may also occur potential conflict of interests and historically founded prejudice in the sphere of real influence of the dominating city if formal scope of competence is shared by various local government units, which is likely to generate distrust on the part of smaller and weaker units towards the dominating city.

Yet another obstacle to regional integration in Polish conditions (metropolitan areas can serve as examples) is the problem with their institutionalisation and the lack of appropriate legal solutions, which makes co-operation problematic, especially in view of financial engagement.

Nevertheless, all the potential difficulties listed above cannot outweigh the benefits which derive from establishing effective co-operation among centres forming a multipolar metropolitan area.

Partnerships of cities (units of territorial administration) are not a new "invention". Examples of spontaneous formation of voluntary alliances of cities in the name of pursuing common interests are *hansas*. Despite loose organisational forms they grew into economic and political powers, which brought prosperity to many of the cities participating in such confederations [Kudłacz, Kyrleto 2004, p. 38].

Intensive urbanisation processes that are currently taking place result in transformations of large cities and their metropolitan areas. As a result of progressing succession of functions a new spatial structure of metropolitan areas is emerging – the network of functional ties between core cities and areas within their zones of influence is undergoing change. Because of decreasing supply of land available for development, growing labour cost and real estate prices, deterioration of the natural environment quality, and ineffective transport systems, large cities are losing inhabitants and investors, who find better conditions for living or business activity in small centres of metropolitan areas. Central metropolitan cities, becoming locations for specialised services, especially in the business service sector, financial services sector, *etc.*, are losing their attractiveness for development of the residential function and traditional business sectors. Territories encompassing large cities have a potentially important role to play in enhancing the competitiveness of metropolitan areas, also in the field of innovative, knowledge-based activities [Wdowicka 2008, pp. 28-29].

Functional integration of a metropolitan area can relieve large cities through providing the residential and recreational functions and offering location to companies which prefer operating outside strongly urbanised areas. The core centres, oriented to development of higher-order functions and leading metropolitan functions, can transfer the service of demand for some basic services to smaller local centres.

All these transformations are leading to the emergence of a new model of spatial organization of a settlement network which differs from Christaller's model (which assumed hierarchical vertical relations) in assuming network-type relations, such as complementarity of centres and co-operation at the institutional level (development of a networked structure of cities in metropolitan regions generates synergy effects, [Domański 2008, p. 52].

The features largely specific to metropolitan regions condition a number of benefits deriving from establishment of co-operation among the entities making up such a region:

- economies of scale resulting from consolidation of the demographic, social and economic potentials;
- easier adjustment of the metropolitan region's structure to changing internal and external determinants;
- reduction of spatial conflicts and more effective overcoming of barriers to growth;
- replacement of competition (often hidden) between cities (administrative units) by strategic alliances and complementary relations through combining one centre's (unit's) assets and resources with another centre's assets and resources and undertaking joint partnership-based projects [*cf.* Klasik 2004, p. 55];
- advantages deriving from synergy, allowing transfer of positive effects from one element of the network to the remaining elements; owing to co-operation and development of complementary relations, which generates externalities, a polycentric metropolitan region can be more than the sum of its parts [Domański 2008, p. 51];
- being in line with sustainable development and placing emphasis on co-existence and harmonious development of all units comprising the metropolitan system, which strengthens correlation between regional and local development [*cf.* Korenik 2004, pp. 27-28];
- orientation to external growth realised through co-operation (while maintaining independence of competencies of each of the units and respecting the administrative boundaries), which improves the prospects of each of the units and at the same time helps improve the position and promote a metropolitan area as a whole [*cf.* Klasik 2004, p. 61].

Apart from these advantages, it is important to note some additional arguments put forward by Klasik [2004, p. 61] with reference to cities of the Upper Silesia agglomeration:

- the potentials and resources allocated and used separately by the constitutive territorial units weaken the competitiveness of each of them as well as the metropolitan area as a whole;
- the service, business, investment *etc.* offers that are created and promoted individually by the territorial units and addressed to the same local and international customers and users are less attractive in comparison with offers developed at the scale of the entire metropolitan area;
- separately prepared offers reduce or eliminate potential synergy effects and external benefits;
- combining the potentials, resources and offers of co-operating territorial units of a metropolitan area enhances the positive effect on the region's development and allows organization of growth processes over the existing administrative boundaries.

Creation of conditions boosting competitiveness must concern the whole territory of a metropolitan region, including areas and settlement units within the sphere

of influence of large cities, which requires advanced co-ordination of activities and collaboration among the centres within a metropolitan area.

4. Organizational and functional links

To achieve potential benefits and create a competitive metropolitan region, the cities undertaking partnership-based co-operation should take actions designed to pool their assets. It is therefore essential to develop complementary links and relationships and to build a strategic alliance based on combined social capital. Creation of such an integrated system is a long-term process which requires involvement of social elites and local governments of co-operating cities (and also, preferably, central government administrative bodies).

Integration means the need for participation of all leading urban centres in the costs of transformation of the entire system and changes in the area of influence. In a multipolar region consisting of several core cities, each of which is a legal and administrative entity and has its own development strategy, it is necessary to have at least some common strategic goals which would generate benefits to all the partners.

Consistent pro-development policy and co-operation among the leading centres as well as elimination of destructive competition among entities oriented to satisfying the demand on the same markets is conducive to the growth of the entire metropolitan region. Such co-ordination of activities makes it possible to benefit from economies of scale and agglomeration, and to achieve competitive advantage.

The essence of a fully developed multipolar area consists in:

- functional ties, measured *i.a.* by flows of people, goods, capital and information;
- joint efforts to effectively employ available resources (material resources, labour, capital);
- mutually beneficial division of labour, specialisation in economic activity and building of complementary economic base;
- institutional co-operation and links, and integrated forms of management;
- efforts to ensure development of all areas within a metropolitan region, especially those with overlapping influences of core cities (co-ordinated and consistent policy and harmonious cooperation of entities in the whole urban region);
- belt-type form of spatial development between the main centres.

When taking action aimed at strengthening the spatial ties it is necessary to carry out analysis of potential costs and benefits.

In the case of differences in potentials and socio-economic structure of urban centres it is essential – apart from efforts to improve transport accessibility – to create mechanisms preventing “erosion” of the potentials of weaker centres in favour of stronger partners. This is a matter of key importance for the functioning of the entire structure – each of the metropolitan centres will derive more benefits from partner-

ship-based co-operation mutually stimulating growth than from the “giver-receiver” relationship. Very important is also co-ordination of the functional development of the multipolar structure, including control of the degree of economic complementarity or competition and development of new forms of co-operation and intersectoral partnership (public authorities, non-governmental organizations, business).

Concluding remarks

The strategic purpose of multipolar co-operation should be the generating of high levels and rates of growth of all co-operating centres and the encompassing metropolitan area, as well as rational spatial management and co-ordination of spatial policy in areas of mutual influences. Potential benefits of such co-operation include more effective use of available resources, improvement of the population’s quality of life, improved transport infrastructure and better management in crisis situations. Achievement of these goals and objectives is realistic only if short-term individual interests are replaced by a long-term vision of partnership-based co-operation of cities within an integrated multipolar area.

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