

General considerations of regional policy

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Abstract: *Regional sciences, including statistics, study the phenomena and processes where space, distance, location have an important role. The regional sciences objectives are to formulate the laws of movement regarding these phenomena, the instruments and techniques for their research and anticipation in their subsequent evolution.*

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The region is a concept with multiple connotations, from the sense of sub-assembly, the territorial unity of a national economy to the area of several national economies.

In the context of the regional labor market and in the most commonly used sense, the region is a territory considered as a delineated entity to be described, analyzed, administered, planned for the application of a particular economic policy. The delimitation is based on its internal homogeneity or functional integration. An essential attribute of the region is generally awareness of a common regional interest. For example, improving regional welfare.

These tools and techniques mainly developed since the first half of the nineteenth century have gradually become a systematic concern centered on the spatial coordinate of an exhaustive analysis.

The region is the fundamental element for the theoretical and practical definition of an economic area, with the grounding of strategies and policies of economic and social development at the territorial level.

In other contexts, it can be said that the region is a specific form of manifestation where the national economic area is structurally comprehensive enough, reflecting the economic reality with its own specific connotation.

The establishment of regional sciences as a distinct scientific field is based on the adoption, from a spatial perspective, of concepts and methods in economics, geography, statistics, econometrics, mathematics, sociology and politics, which have an interdisciplinary character. At the same time, the regions of a country's national economies can be studied as component parts that can be statistically recorded at a local level as complex statistical units representing the organizational, economic and social structure of the specific country.

A particularly important aspect is the widening of the area of the regional science analysis. Along with territorial statistics, there were outlined disciplines such as regional forecasting, regional planning, urban planning and economics, rural economy, infrastructure economy etc.

These sciences and statistics have as their main concern the elaboration of the theoretical and methodological basis for regional strategies and policies, respectively the creation of a set of objectives and methods of reducing regional imbalances, in the conditions of growth and economic development.

The European changes in the recent decades involve geopolitical, social, cultural changes at the level of scientific research. Concerns about the regional dimension of European processes involve new institutional models on regional development funding. In this context, it is essential to adapt territorial statistics to the needs of systemic development of regional policies.

The following criteria are used for the regions delimitation: economic, administrative, geographical, social, cultural, historical and ecological.

Depending on these criteria, three types of regions can be distinguish:

- Homogenous regions established considering certain unifying characteristics such as:
 - the economic criterion: income per capita or relatively close unemployment rates;
 - the geographical criterion: topography or a similar climate;
 - the socio-political criterion.

- nodal (polarized) regions where cohesion is the result of interdependencies around a dominant center

- regions for planning (programming) where the unit is due to an institutional-administrative environment with specific regional development policies and programs.

Therefore, the region is considered as an administrative-territorial unit of a country that has both geographic and administrative determination that implies the existence of institutional competences and consequently a certain autonomy with respect to the central authority.

The regions can be grouped according to territorial typological criterion. The usefulness of typological groups is needed to substantiate specific regional policies on these categories of regions and to make the hierarchy of these units by combining several interdependent criteria.

Considering the criteria of economic and social development, the regions that make up a territory can be:

- agricultural regions, with a low economic development level;
- decreasing industrial regions;
- regions under the pressure of a steep development.

The agricultural regions in difficulty generally have a lower position than a central region, they lie on large areas and their population is smaller or dispersed, the share of the employed population in agriculture is very high and the infant mortality rate is higher than the average for the country, the income per capita is low, the unemployment rate is high.

Emigration is directed from rural areas to urban centers or other regions due to job shortages.

Degraded or abandoned industrial regions are highlighted by lower activity rates, modest incomes per capita, rising emigration.

The regions characterized by rapid growth are those where resources and infrastructure have a high degree of use in the economic activity, and job offers are high when compared to demand. In these regions, although labor indicators and population incomes show favorable values, there are issues related to population density, pollution or social dysfunctions.

The policy of the European Union's regional development is meant for people. Its purpose is to create jobs, increase the level of competitiveness, ensure the development of human skills and a better quality of life:

- a cleaner environment;
- safe roads;
- very available and multifold services.

The regional development policy is a policy of financial solidarity. This allows the transfer of more than 35% of the EU budget to less favored regions.

Funding the European Union's regional development policy is effected through the so-called Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund.

The Structural Funds focus on clearly defined priorities, on the following objectives:

A first objective is to economically and socially protect the underdeveloped regions.

These regions have "deficient" economic indicators:

- low investments level;
- over average unemployment rate;
- lack of certain services for individuals or legal persons;
- improper basic infrastructure.

This objective has a number of characteristics, namely: for economically and socially underdeveloped regions the aim is to eliminate the gaps between them and the other regions of the European Union. This starts with the remediation of basic infrastructure (transport, water supply, energy, waste processing, telecommunications, health and education). A significant share of available funds is spent on building this infrastructure, without neglecting the services that enable a fragile productive structure to be strengthened and revitalized.

The second objective aims to support economic and social conversion in areas facing structural difficulties.

The difficulties faced by these regions are:

- industrial sectors or services subject to restructuring;
- the disappearance of traditional activities in rural areas;
- declining urban areas;
- difficulties in the fishing sector.

This objective has a number of characteristics, namely: the main problem for areas going through a conversion process is rather the decline of traditional economic activities than the lack of infrastructure. In this case the development of administrative solutions is imperative. A specific additional infrastructure can be built in these areas in order to improve their attractiveness and increase the employment level.

The third objective is to promote the modernization of vocational training systems and job creation.

The main social groups covered by this objective are the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the victims of social exclusion and the under-qualified workers. They can receive support regardless of the area in which they live, and it is unnecessary for them to be considered a region that is left behind in terms of development.

The directions for achieving this goal are:

- basic and lifelong vocational training;
- support for employment and the elimination of unpaid work;
- improved education, training and employment support structures;
- creating partnerships between vocational training institutions and firms;
- supporting employees to become flexible and adaptable;
- equal chances.

Part of the regional development funds, specific to regional policy, are divided into four Community Initiatives seeking common solutions to specific problems:

Interreg III promotes cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation, i.e. the establishment of cross-border partnerships to stimulate the balanced development of multi-regional areas.

Urban II focuses its support on innovative strategies for revitalizing cities and declining urban areas.

Leader + seeks to stimulate active actors in rural communities and economies to develop new local sustainable development strategies.

Equal seeks to eliminate the factors that cause inequality and discrimination in the labor market.

The Structural Funds do not finance separate individual projects, they support only multiannual regional development programs jointly developed by the regions, Member States and the European Commission.

The three Structural Funds are:

- European Regional Development Fund;
- European Social Fund;
- Cohesion Fund.

And two complementary actions:

- Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance;
- European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund.

The Cohesion Fund provides direct funding for individual projects in order to improve the environmental conditions and the development of transport networks.

The EU is one of the most prosperous regions in the world, but the disparities between the Member States' economic and social indicators are much more obvious if we look at them from the over 250 existing regions.

In other words, the Europeans do not all have the same chances of facing the challenges of globalization and integration. These chances depend on the area they live and work in:

- a more prosperous or poorer region;
- a dynamic or declining area;
- in the urban or rural environment;
- in the outskirts of the union or one of its economic centers.

EUROSTAT, the EU Statistical Office, the European Commission and the Member States have developed the "Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS)" in order to achieve a uniform classification for Union regional statistics. This nomenclature divides each Member State of the Union into a number of NUTS-1 regions, which in turn are subdivided into a number of NUTS-2 level regions and so on up to the NUTS-5 level.

Conclusion

The European Union's cohesion policy, built into the Treaties since 1986, has been given the objective of reducing the gap in the different regions' levels of development, in order to strengthen economic and social cohesion. The new proposal introduced a number of important changes to the way cohesion policy is designed and implemented. Based on the proposed General Regulation laying down the common provisions for the Cohesion and Structural funds put forward by the European Commission for the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, cohesion policy will be even more focused on Europe 2020 goals and targets – while not forgetting the objective of territorial cohesion.

By introducing technical progress, new technologies have a particular dynamism. Here is how the quality of the human factor, the level of qualification and the conditions offered by the formative educational system for polyqualification can be important factors for the increase of the adaptability of the labor force, of the occupational mobility and the restoration of the balance on the regional labor market.

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