UDC 331.2

Derlukiewicz Niki
Wroclaw University of Economics
e-mail: niki.derlukiewicz@ue.wroc.pl

Smart specialisation as a new concept of developing innovative regions

Innowacyjność gospodarki od kilku lat jest jednym z priorytetów w polityce Unii Europejskiej oraz jej państw członkowskich. W związku z tym w krajach i regionach UE podejmowane są różne inicjatywy, działania i projekty służące zwiększaniu innowacyjności. W artykule przedstawiono teoretyczne rozważania dotyczące rozwoju innowacyjności gospodarki, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem gospodarki regionalnej oraz zaprezentowano nową koncepcję rozwoju regionów w oparciu o ich inteligentne specjalizacje, tzw. smart specialisations.

Introduction. The European Union aspires to meet the challenges of globalization and transform the European economy into one of the most competitive economies in the world. The road to accomplish this is through supporting innovation. For many years the European Union has been undertaking activities aimed at supporting innovation. This is evident primarily in the politics and the numerous initiatives and projects designed to contribute to the increase in innovation of the European economy.

The innovation Policy of the European Union has been evolving for many years by redefining the objectives and creating various interaction instruments. Up to date, despite many attempts at various levels (community, national and regional level) to create innovative economy, the desired outcomes have not been achieved. The latest social and economic development strategy of the European Union (Europe 2020 – a European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth), adopted by member states in June 2010 replaced the previous Lisbon Strategy, which had been adopted in 2000 and modified five years later. Until the policy change, the Lisbon Strategy had defined the development prospects of the EU focusing on, e.g. the necessity to promote activities aimed at improving research and innovation [Communication From The Commission Europe 2020- A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, European Commission, Brussels 2010].

Recently, a lot of interest in innovation and its influence on economic growth can be observed at the regional level. [De la Mothe, Paguet, 1998, p.18]. Regions are an appropriate level for stimulating innovation and many regional governments have important competences and budgets to support innovation [15].

According to the EU guidelines, the new financial perspective for 2014-2020 assumes that each region should have a strategy for smart specialisation (Regional innovation strategies for smart specialisation, RIS3). This will allow the funds for research and development to be allocated more efficiently and with greater benefit to regional specialisations; also the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy will be more efficient.

The aim of this article is to present the theoretical aspects of the development of innovative regions and to discuss the new concept of smart specialisation.

Development of innovative regions. The main feature of regional development is regional growth of the economy, which means the increase in production of goods and services as a result of quantitative increase of applied production factors, as well as their improved efficiency. The qualitative and structural changes should accompany the quantitative changes. A significant aspect of the regional development is a technical and technological progress that reflects in the quality and modernity of produced goods and services in the region [Fagerberg, Mowery, Nelson, 2006, p. 298.].

Recently, the aspect of regional development that has gained in importance is development based on knowledge and innovation. Thus, most European regions have started conducting their own regional innovation policy. It is important to mention that innovation policy is a type of economic policies and includes areas, such as: the development and extension of the capacity to innovate (both in terms of technique and technology, as well as organization and education), better use of innovation as a basic factor of economic growth, and technological and qualitative changes in the industry.

The most important tasks of innovation policy can be defined as [Niedzielski, Rychlik, 2006, p. 105]:

– to lay out the direction and structure of R&D and to develop the necessary infrastructure for innovation,

– to create favorable conditions for innovation, i.e. to protect intellectual and industrial property, to improve the regulatory environment and provide more funding for innovation activities,

– to stimulate research and innovation, i.e. to establish a strategic vision for the direction of research and development, to create new technological companies and strengthen the cooperation between research institutions, universities and businesses,

– to create a culture of innovation, i.e. to educate and train entrepreneurs, to promote the exchange of staff, students, researchers between universities and business. What is also significant is the development of innovative attitudes, and the awareness of public authorities,

– to promote and support international cooperation in science and technology, by enabling the flow of new discoveries, knowledge and modern technology.

The characteristics and tasks of innovation policy described above should be considered as a general framework for determining the area of interest and activities of this policy. Each region conducts its own innovation policy tailored to the local conditions. However, the objective of innovation policy is to intensify the implementation of new technological and organizational solutions in all spheres of the economy. This goal can be achieved through the stimulation and promotion of innovative attitudes in society and through support of the development of institutions for innovation [Mync, 1998, p. 226-241.]

Most European Union regions conduct regional innovation policy and some of them have just implemented regional innovation strategies (RIS) – strategic documents aimed at supporting regional authorities in the implementation of an effective innovation system in the region, setting directions of innovation policies and optimizing pro-innovative capabilities of regional infrastructure [Morgan, Nauwelaers, 2003, p.20]. Regional innovation strategy is based on analyses of technological requirements, capabilities and potential of regional R&D organizations, scientific centers and companies in terms of management, finance, training, organization and technology of each region [Feldman, Link, 2001, p. 23.]. Another task of RIS is to create long-lasting partnership between industry, local authorities, research centers and business in order to:

- support regional authorities in the creation and implementation of an efficient system for stimulating innovation in the region,
- provide foundations for long-lasting economic partnership between entities of R&D and industry sector,
- increase the innovativeness and competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by facilitating the transfer of R&D results and other innovation to the SME sector,
- facilitate the introduction of new technologies into regional economy in order to improve the innovative potential of the region,
- improve the competences of scientific personnel and companies dealing with research, development and implementation of innovations [Zięba, Mazurkiewicz, 2007, p. 154].

It is important to mention that for many regions RIS have become a basis for regional transformation towards a knowledge-based economy, emphasizing the impact of investment in education, training, research and innovations [Derlukiewicz, 2009, p. 59-110]. However, according to Europe 2020, the new socio-economic strategy of the European Union a new concept of supporting innovations in regions has appeared. It is called smart specialisation [A Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Communication from the Commission, COM (2010) 2020 final, 2010, p.10.].

The concept of smart specialization. Smart specialisation is a new concept of innovation policy aimed at promoting the efficient and effective use of public investment in research. It is

designed to improve innovation in regions in order to achieve economic growth and prosperity, by allowing regions to focus on their strengths. Building a smart specialisation strategy should be based on the analysis of regional assets and technology. It also needs to include an analysis of potential partners in other regions and avoid unnecessary duplication. Smart specialisation needs to be based on a strong partnership between businesses, public entities and knowledge institutions, because such partnerships are considered crucial for success [8]. Smart Specialisation, or commonly called RIS3 (Research and Innovation strategies for Smart Specialisation), is a strategic approach to economic development through targeted support for research and innovation. It involves a number of processes, e.g. formulating a vision, identifying areas of greatest strategic potential, setting strategic priorities and using smart policies to boost the knowledge-based development potential of a region, regardless of its level of socio-economic development. The resulting RIS3 emphasizes the uniqueness of each region. When implementing the concept of smart specialisation in regions it is important realize that their resources and budgets are limited. Therefore, it could be advantageous for the economic and social development of regions if regional governments formulate policies which support the areas with the highest potential for regional prosperity [Baier, Kroll, Zenker, 2013, p. 2-6].

What is also worth emphasizing is the fact that in 2011 the European Commission launched the Strategies for Smart Specialisation Platform (S3 Platform), which provides professional support to EU regions and helps them to design their Research and Innovation strategies for smart specialisation.

Conclusion. Regions that generate innovations tend to develop more dynamically than those with limited inventive potential and capabilities for imitation and adaptation of innovative solutions. It must be emphasized that foundations for innovations are always found in the innovation environment and the region's potential to develop innovations. Another important factor affecting the development of innovative regions is cooperation between science and business and networking structures that exists in the region. Innovative region is characterized not only by its abilities to produce and absorb innovations, but also to transform them in accordance with its own development needs and requirements of the local market. A concept of smart specialisation is a new approach to the development of innovative regions initiated by the European Union. This approach aims at concentrating efforts of regions on their strengths and potentially prosperous branches. Therefore it is expected that resources in the 2014-2020 will be allocated more efficiently and will contribute to the development of innovative regions.

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