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PREFERENCES OF POLES CONCERNING THE SHAPE OF REGIONAL POLICY AND THE ALLOCATION OF EUROPEAN FUNDS

Wojciech KISIAŁA
Artur BAJERSKI
Bartosz STĘPIŃSKI

Wojciech KISIAŁA (Corresponding author)

Lecturer, Department of Spatial and Environmental Economics,
University of Economics and Business, Poznań, Poland

Tel: 0048-608-500.459

E-mail: wojciech.kisiala@ue.poznan.pl

Artur BAJERSKI

Lecturer, Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial
Management, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

Bartosz STĘPIŃSKI

Research Project Manager, Public Profits Ltd., Poznań, Poland

Abstract

The social reception of economic development processes has been underrated in studies conducted so far. The scarcity of such analyses may be perceived as a problem especially in the case of CEE states, in which economic growth has often been accompanied by a deepening of the socio-economic inequalities in the recent years. This article aims to identify the preferences of Poles concerning the goals of regional policy and the assignment of the European funds. Special attention was given to the differences among various categories of residents, examined in terms of their places of residence, occupational status, education, and age. The research has shown a highly positive attitude of Poles concerning the European funds, and statistically significant relations between selected socio-demographic characteristics of Poles and their preferences concerning the places and fields of activity to which the funds should go.

Keywords: European funds, regional policy, preferences, survey research, Poland.

1. Introduction

Since the introduction of the so-called Delors I Package making effective the provisions of the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, the European Union's structural funds have become chief instruments intended to ensure economic and social cohesion at the Community level (Bailey and De Propriis, 2002; De Michelis and Monfort, 2008; Paraskevopoulos and Leonardi, 2004). With the transformation of the principles of the Community's regional policy, there was a growing conviction of a great importance of those two cohesion dimensions for its development. Also growing was the weight attached to the territorial cohesion, as reflected first in the approach to its adoption in the Lisbon Treaty, and then in the statement made in the Territorial Agenda of the European Union that territorial cohesion was the basic goal of the EU spatial policy (Faludi, 2009; Cotella, 2012). Establishing this goal was connected, among others, with the admission of ten new members to the EU in 2004, and then Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. Because of the distinctly lower level of economic development in those countries than in the 'old' EU members, the enlargement meant a great increase in the inter-regional differences. It was the new members that became the greatest beneficiaries of the European cohesion policy and that took active part in working out its principles: the states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) were active in preparing the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, thus in fact determining its shape (Cotella, 2012)¹.

In the 2007-2013 financial perspective, 347 billion euros were allotted to the EU cohesion policy. Nearly half of this sum went to the 12 new members (Wokoun, 2007), the highest proportion – almost 20% of the means, or as much as 67 billion euros – going to Poland. This was due to a combination of two factors: its large population number (38 million) and its sub-average level of economic development (lower in terms of per capita GDP than in the majority of the EU members from Central and Eastern Europe).

The use of such substantial financial means as those Poland has received in the form of Community funds is closely connected with the adoption of a specific development policy (model) and strategic, integrated thinking about regional development. This is especially significant in the CEE states because of the complexity and the scale of the socio-economic transformation they have undergone since 1989, and because of the large-scale effect of this transformation on spatial differences (Adams, 2006; Baláž, Kľuvánková-Oravská and Zajac, 2007; Finka, 2011; Korec and Rusnák, 2013). The development problems still facing Poland and the remaining CEE countries include the territorial uneven economic growth and greater differences in the

1 As Cotella (2012, p. 27) states, 'A pivotal role was played here by Polish DG Regio Commissioner Danuta Hübner and by her successor Paweł Samecki because the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional Policy (DG Regio) was a key player in the Territorial Agenda process, this suggesting some degree of potential CEE influence at a crucial point in territorial development policy'.

level of economic development among regions comparatively with the old EU states (Bachtler and Gorzelak 2007). This concerns in particular the ever-growing divergence between the dynamically developing metropolitan areas and the peripheral regions with their high unemployment rate and poverty (Czyż, 2012; Smętkowski, 2013; Churski, 2014).

An example of a policy intended to strengthen territorial cohesion is the new 'National Strategy for Regional Development 2010-2020' adopted by the Polish government in 2010. It assumes efficient use of individual territorial development potentials to achieve medium-term growth in the economy, employment and spatial cohesion. However, observers both from Poland and abroad have some doubts about the attainment of those directions because the experience shows that the achievement of the declared regional policy targets has been rather limited in Poland so far (Czyż and Hauke, 2011; Czyż, 2012; Ferry, 2013). As Churski puts it (2014, p. 76), 'the development policy pursued so far has proved to be of limited effectiveness in the convergence of socio-economic development at the regional level while producing a divergence noticeable at the local level'.

Whatever the doubts regarding the realistic chance of attaining the above development directions, one can note that they have a significant social dimension: they are supposed to prevent marginalization, and the local measures taken should be based on partnership. To achieve this, it seems necessary to have a detailed knowledge not only of development potentials of various areas, but also opinions and attitudes of their residents concerning preferred development directions, and hence their preferences as to the fields of allocation of the European funds. This becomes obvious when reflecting on the main goals of economic development itself, which – simplifying greatly – always affects people, and its effects are supposed to serve them (Cox, 2011).

The knowledge of the residents' opinions about the allocation of the European means is also important for more particular reasons. First, in Poland, as in many other less wealthy EU states, the means obtained from the European funds make up a substantial part of the local budgets (Swianiewicz *et al.*, 2010; Gonçalves Veiga, 2012). Second, those means play a special role in investments made by local governments: according to Swianiewicz *et al.* (2010), in the years 2004-2008 over 90% of the funds obtained by them went to investment. Third, learning and accommodating the opinions of the residents about the use of the European funds and regional policy directions could be a factor contributing to greater public trust in administrative organs of various rungs and a small step towards overcoming the 'culture of distrust' which, as Sztompka (1996) observes, still pervades Polish society at all levels of social life. An adverse effect of the lack of trust on the implementation of EU regional policy in Poland has been demonstrated by Swianiewicz *et al.* (2010) and Lackowska-Madurowicz and Swianiewicz (2013). Fourth, learning the opinions of the residents about the use of the European means is increasingly important with the advancing professionalization of the local governments in obtaining and using them (Swianiewicz *et al.*, 2008; Swianiewicz, 2013), and also because of the great signifi-

cance of those means for strategic development planning by local authorities (Bachtler and Turok, 2013). And finally, studies conducted so far show that most Poles not only have supported its EU membership throughout the entire period after their country's accession in 2004, but can also see the beneficial effect of the European funds obtained (Cichocki, 2011). In this matter, the situation in Poland is, on the one hand, similar to the one observed in Western Europe in the late 1990s, where the increase in the budget of structural funds was accompanied by the increase in support for the EU (Osterloh, 2008). On the other hand, though, it is unique as Poland ranks highest in the EU in terms of familiarity with EU-funded projects among citizens, and the belief in their positive impact on the socioeconomic growth (Eurobarometer, 2013). However, as Cichocki (2011) demonstrates, the beneficial effect of the European funds in Poland is seen fairly stereotypically, in terms of infrastructural investment (mostly transport infrastructure). This leads to people's appreciation of the role of the funds in their country's development while being blind to major individual (personal) advantages generated from their use.

The above arguments and the fact that the attitudes and preferences of Poles concerning the European funds are still poorly known (like those of the residents of other EU states) were the main motives behind the research undertaken for the purposes of this article. Its main target was to uncover and understand preferences of the Poles concerning the country's regional policy and the assignment of the European funds in the successive years. Special attention was given to differences – so far not analyzed – among various categories of residents concerning their preferences for allotting the funds to particular places and fields of activity, examined in terms of their places of residence, occupational status, education, and age. This article is intended to fill the gap in research on the social context of economic development, which at present is largely connected with the regional policy of the European Union and its national equivalent.

2. Research methods

We used a diagnostic survey method involving the accumulation of knowledge about social phenomena, views and opinions of selected communities, and the intensification and trends of the various phenomena (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). The goal of the poll conducted for the purposes of this research was to identify attitudes and preferences of Poland's residents concerning the regional policy pursued so far, and the allocation of the European funds in the successive years.

During the development of the diagnostic studies, many survey research techniques have been worked out (Oppermann, 1995; Schmidt, 1997; Stanton, 1998; Lazar and Preece, 1999; Jansen, Corley and Jansen, 2007). In spite of the increasingly popular modern survey research techniques replacing the traditional PAPI technique, it was this method that was used in the present research. The basic reason for choosing it was the wish to conduct the survey research not only in the largest cities but also in the peripheral areas, which made CATI and CAWI techniques less fit for the purpose.

Based on the filled questionnaires a database was constructed with answers of all the respondents, which allowed a further mathematical-statistical analysis of the material collected. The respondents were divided into groups, the criteria being the socio-demographic variables listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the research respondents

Variable	Variants (categories) of variable
Place of residence	town village
Education	below secondary secondary higher
Age	25 and under 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 66 and over
Occupational status	permanently employed entrepreneur unemployed old-age/ disability pensioner student/ pupil

Source: Authors' own compilation

We used several statistical methods. When examining the relations between the responses given and the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, correlation analysis was employed. In order to reduce the analyzed variables to binary ones, we used the Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient (also known as the Kendall rank coefficient). This is a non-parametric method making it possible to establish whether two variables can be regarded as statistically dependent (without assuming a specified statistical distribution of the variables analyzed). The values of tau-b, as of the classic Pearson's correlation coefficient, range from -1 (100% negative association) to +1 (100% positive association). The value of zero indicates the absence of association.

In order to corroborate the presence of selected statistical dependences identified by Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient, we used the Kendall's partial tau correlation. It allows estimating the strength of the relation between a pair of variables while eliminating the effect of other variables.

3. Organization of the research and characteristics of the respondents

The survey research was conducted from August 20 to September 10, 2012 in six out of Poland's 16 administrative regions (*województwa*, or voivodeships): Wielkopolska, Małopolska, Pomorania, West Pomorania, Kujavia-Pomorania, and Łódź. Poll takers collected opinions of randomly selected respondents, both in the capitals of

the regions (metropolitan centers, i.e. Poznań, Kraków, Gdańsk, Szczecin, Bydgoszcz, Toruń, and Łódź), and in the remaining towns and villages located at various distances from a region's center.

The questions concerned opinions about the effect of the European funds on socio-economic development, the knowledge of the investments carried out in the metropolitan areas and financed from Community means, and the preferences as to the place and field of activity that those means should go to.

The research embraced a total of 1,081 persons, most of them from Wielkopolska (380), Pomerania (281), and Małopolska (188). Smaller samples were examined in the voivodeships of Kujavia-Pomerania (105), West Pomerania (83) and Łódź (44). Females made up 51% of the respondents, and males, 49%. Attempts to make age-structure proportions fully representative were unsuccessful. There were 363 people aged under 26 (34%), 222 aged 26-35 (21%), 191 aged 36-45 (18%), 169 aged 46-55 (16%), 76 aged 56-65 (7%), and 59 aged over 65 (5%).

More than one-third of those surveyed were permanently employed (38%). Also students were represented in a significant proportion (31%). Entrepreneurs accounted for 14% of the respondents, while the share of the unemployed was just over 8%, and pensioners 9%. They were mostly well educated: every other person had secondary education (49%), and every third, higher education (32%). Close to 15% had vocational education, and the remaining 3% were people with basic and no education².

4. Preferences of Poland's residents concerning the regional policy conducted and the allocation of European funds in the light of the research results

The first step on the analysis of the preferences regarding the regional policy and the allocation of the European funds was to find if the respondents considered those funds significant, i.e., if they thought they affect Poland's socio-economic development in a significant way. As it turned out, a decided majority of respondents observed such an effect: more than 80% of the respondents thought it to be strong or very strong. This result is in line with those obtained in a study conducted by evaluators earlier (SMG/KRC, 2011). Out of the various categories of respondents, most of those who stressed the significance of the funds for the development processes were young and well educated: students, people with higher education, and those aged up to 35 (almost 90% of the respondents from each of those categories). And those

2 Because of the direct contact of poll takers with respondents during the diagnostic study, the answers to questions about occupational status and education could cause embarrassment, especially among the unemployed and uneducated persons. It is therefore possible that in reality the proportion of people in those groups could be higher, and the information given in this matter should be treated with some reserve. On the other hand, it was the well-educated and professionally active people who, with their better orientation in the research problems examined, appreciated the importance of the analyses conducted, and hence were more willing to answer the poll takers' questions.

who thought them less important were mostly poorly educated, not economically active (the unemployed, pensioners), and those over 56 years of age (just over 60%). In turn, there were no major differences in the significance of socio-economic development ascribed to the funds by residents of towns and villages: it was declared to be strong or very strong by 82% and 77%, respectively, of respondents from those groups (Figure 1).

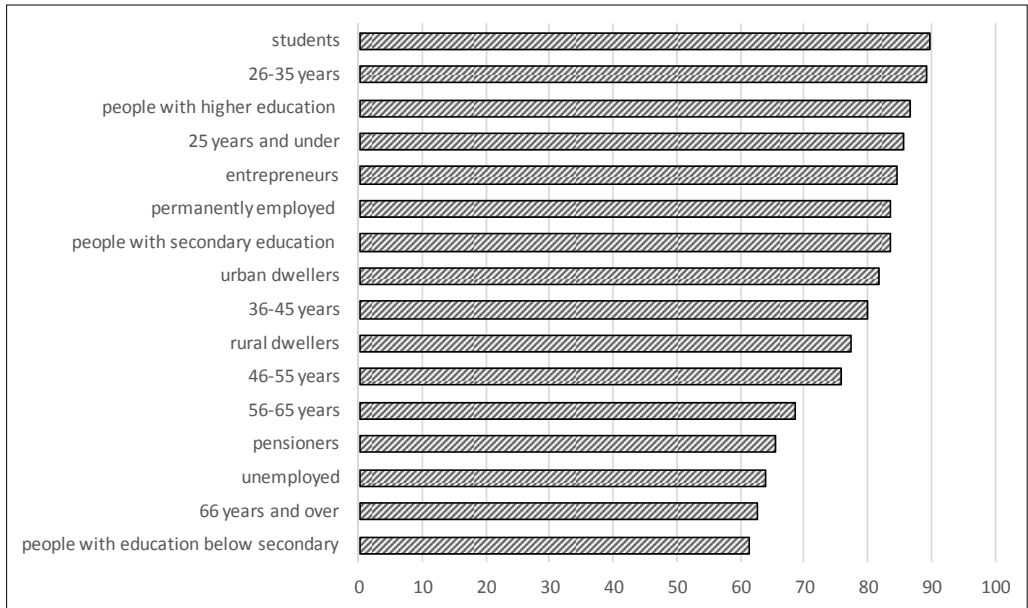


Figure 1: Proportion of persons (%) declaring the effect of the European funds on socio-economic development to be very strong and strong, and their features

Source: Authors' own compilation

An analysis was made of the respondents' preferences as to the field of activity to which the European funds should go. For this purpose, six potential general fields were distinguished, the weight of which fully depended on the decisions of public authorities from various levels (among those disregarded were, e.g., subsidies for farmers). The respondents were asked to choose three most important fields and to assign to them a weight ranging from 3 (the most important) to 1 (the least important). Figure 2 presents the fields preferred by the respondents in terms of the average weight of responses.

According to the respondents, the European funds should go, first of all, to measures (projects) improving the quality of transport infrastructure (1.27). A similarly high rank was assigned to fighting unemployment and upgrading the population's skills (courses and training, 1.16), and to better access to public services (1.14). Environmental protection, scientific research, and support for entrepreneurship were listed among less significant goals.

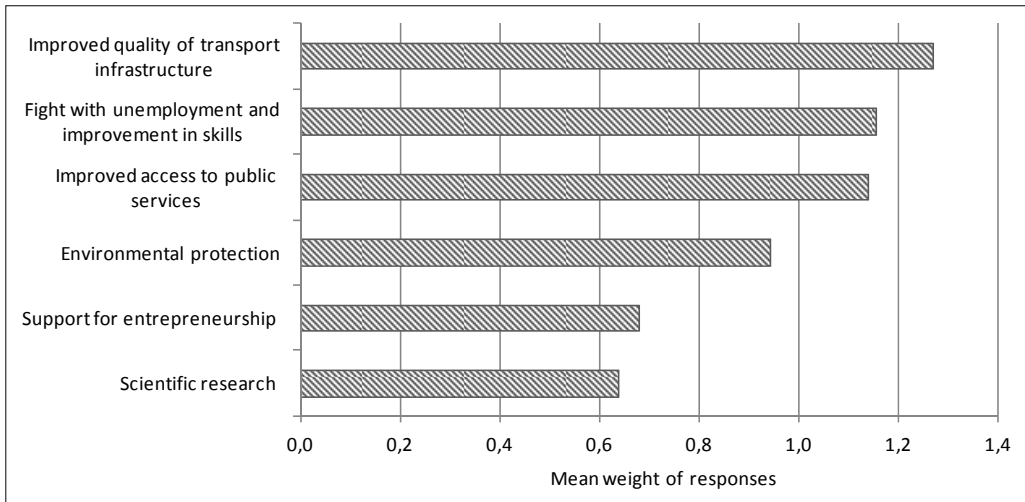


Figure 2: Preferred fields of activity to which European funds should go

Source: Authors' own research

It is worth comparing the findings of the current research with the results obtained in earlier studies. According to SMG/KRC (2011), citizens indicated that the allotment of European funds should go to transport infrastructure and means of transportation (48%), subsidies for farmers (28%), education and science (13%), and measures fighting unemployment (12%). This means that the most readily noticed investments are primarily the so-called hard ones (infrastructure) and those that raised the interest of media (infrastructure, subsidies for farmers; Cichocki, 2011).

The present research shows that the European funds are not allotted to what Poles regard as the most important fields. This primarily concerns high expectations as to an improvement in access to public services (taking place in reality, but which they do not seem to notice), and using Community means to fight unemployment and organize vocational courses and training. Those measures are acknowledged by the respondents, but their magnitude is thought to be unsatisfactory. When comparing the above results with those obtained in the other 'new' EU member states, one can observe that Poles' expectations as to the fields of activity to which the European funds should go are typical for the societies of the CEE post-socialist states (Eurobarometer, 2013). They are even fairly similar to those of socio-political elites, especially in expecting the means to go for improving transport infrastructure (Dostál, 2013).

It is also worth comparing the above results against those obtained by Kisiała (2013) and Kisiała and Stępiński (2013), who analyzed the opinions of the local government representatives in Poland on the acquisition and use of the European funds. They thought that those funds should be used primarily to improve the quality of the transport infrastructure, and only then to improve access to public services and for environmental protection. Thus, there is a significant divergence between the opinion of the local authorities, favoring almost exclusively 'hard' projects, and the opinion of

the residents, for whom 'soft' projects are equally important, especially those devoted to reducing unemployment and improving their employability (i.e., potentially dedicated to some of them).

An equally important issue regarding where the EU-funded intervention should go is its geographical destination. Greatly simplifying, it can be reduced to a fundamental dilemma of the regional policy: equality or efficiency in the socio-economic development of the country as a whole (Gorzalak, 2006; Szul, 2007; Hübner, 2008). It involves the choice between the so-called equalizing model, which assumes support primarily for the less developed and peripheral areas, and the so-called polarizing-diffusion model, with funds going first of all to those best developed in economic terms (especially metropolitan areas and cities). The polarizing-diffusion mechanism rests on the assumption that the rate of return is the highest for the capital invested in the strongest economic units, which – in accordance with the classical conception of growth poles (Perroux, 1955; Boudeville, 1966) and polarized development theory (Friedmann, 1967, 1972) – should generate development impulses for the remaining areas (Bachtler and Raines, 2002; Gorzalak, 2008; Blažek and Uhlíř 2011).

When analyzing the preferences of respondents for the places where the EU funds should be allocated, there was no clear tendency with regard to the support given to any type of area when analyzed in general terms. 36.3% of those surveyed chose that primarily peripheral areas and villages should be supported, while 34.7% stated that it was metropolitan areas and cities that should be supported first of all. The remaining of the respondents (29.0%) opted for giving no preference to any of those two categories of area.

The situation looked different when the preferences were analyzed from the perspective of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Respondents representing most of the categories examined (10 out of 15) preferred that the EU funds to go to peripheral areas (Figure 3). This was especially pronounced in the case of the rural dwellers, more than half of whom (57%) opted that the support under regional policy to go exclusively to the peripheral areas (as against to 21% of them being in favor of the support primarily to go to cities and metropolitan areas). There was also a high predominance of responses preferring peripheral and rural areas among persons aged 46-55 years old, and more than 66-year old. In the remaining categories of the respondents the predominance of the support for peripheral areas over that for cities and metropolitan areas was only slight (no more than 10%). In this group were persons with education below secondary, with secondary and higher education, permanently employed workers, not economically active (pensioners and the unemployed), and persons aged 25 and under (although here there was only a minimum of predominance of peripheral areas and villages). Cities and metropolitan areas as chief destinations of the European funds predominated in the answers of respondents belonging to the following categories: urban dwellers, entrepreneurs, students, and persons aged 26-35 and 46-45.

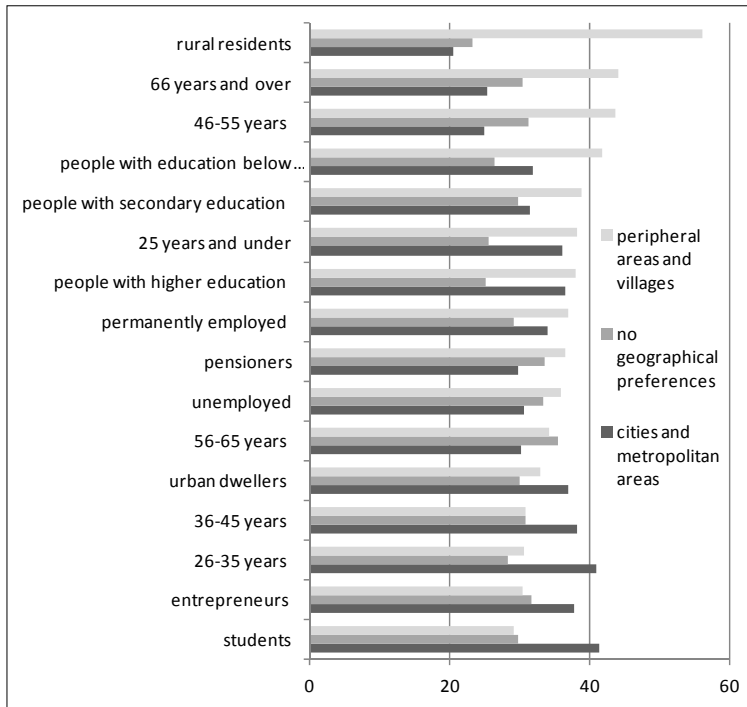


Figure 3: Categories of respondents and geographical preferences in spending European funds

Source: Authors' own research

5. Statistical relations between the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and their preferences for spending European funds

A detailed insight into the potential relations between the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their preferences as to the spending of the European funds was obtained via correlation analysis. To that end, the variables were binarised: each respondent was assigned value 1 for the variant of a variable he/she represented (e.g., a person with higher education) and value 0 for the other variants of this variable (a person with secondary education; a person with education below secondary). Because of the binarisation, we used the Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient. The conclusions drawn on this basis were additionally verified by calculating the value of Kendall's partial tau correlation coefficient. This procedure was necessary to make sure that the identified dependences were not a result of a direct effect of other, potentially present, variables.

The first analysis focused on the statistical relation between the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their spatial preferences for spending the European funds. Not surprisingly, the strongest statistical dependence occurred between the place of residence (town or village) and the declared backing for support going to metropolitan areas and cities or peripheral areas and villages (Table 2). Rural dwellers preferred the means to go to rural and peripheral areas, while urban

dwellers preferred their allocation in urban and metropolitan areas. Although both relations were not strong ($\tau\text{-}b = 0.169$ and 0.121 , respectively), they were statistically significant even at $p \leq 0.001$. These results also indicate a slightly stronger tendency of rural dwellers to support rural areas than of urban dwellers to support cities and metropolitan areas. It is worth adding that the obtained coefficient values do not change much in the case of Kendall's partial tau correlation where the control variable is the level of education: for the relation between life in a village and support for villages and peripheral areas, it was 0.160 , and for life in a city and support for cities and metropolitan areas, 0.114 ; in both cases at $p \leq 0.001$.

Apart from the place of residence, statistically significant relations were found also between the preferences concerning the spatial allocation of the European funds and the education and age of the respondents. Persons with higher education and those aged 26-35 had a slight tendency to allocate means in cities and metropolitan areas ($\tau\text{-}b = 0.095$ at $p \leq 0.002$, and $\tau\text{-}b = 0.067$ at $p \leq 0.028$, respectively), while persons aged 46-55 tended to prefer peripheral areas and villages. Those dependences also turned out to be statistically significant with the place of residence (town or village) as control. Kendall's partial correlation coefficient was 0.085 (at $p \leq 0.005$) for the relation between preferred support for metropolitan areas and cities and higher education, and 0.064 (at $p \leq 0.044$) for the relation with the age of 26-35. These results suggest that the support for the allocation of the means in metropolitan areas and cities is connected with a deeper pro-European attitude that can be identified with a pro-modernization approach. As earlier studies have already demonstrated, support for the European Union membership grows most strongly with economic status, and slightly less with an increase in education and occupational status (Doyle and Fidrmuc, 2006).

However, considering the relatively low values of the correlation coefficient (Table 2), one can state that the respondents' preferences regarding the spatial allocation of the European funds, although showing some relations with their socio-demographic characteristics, are connected with them only slightly and seem to be an individual matter depending on a complex attitude towards the processes of economic development.

The other analysis focused on the potential relation between the respondents' characteristics and their preferences for the fields of activity where the European funds should go, i.e. their support for specified types of measure (Table 3). Certain statistical relations were found between the socio-demographic features of the respondents and four fields of activity: (1) improvement in access to public services, (2) fight with unemployment and improvement in skills, (3) improvement in the quality of transport infrastructure, and (4) support for entrepreneurship. In turn, no statistically significant relation was found to hold between the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and their preferences for spending European funds on scientific research and environmental protection. This seems to be somewhat puzzling, especially the absence of a relation between the respondents' education and those two fields of activity.

Table 2: Values of Kendall's tau-b coefficient of correlation between the selected socio-demographic variables and spatial preferences for spending the European funds

Variables	Metropolitan areas and cities	No spatial preferences	Peripheral areas and villages
Place of residence			
Town	.121**	.052	-.169**
Village	-.121**	-.052	.169**
Education			
below secondary	-.028	-.029	.055
secondary	-.067*	.014	.052
higher	.095**	.008	-.102**
Age			
25 and under	.020	-.053*	.030
26-35	.067*	-.007	-.060*
36-45	.034	.019	-.052
46-55	-.089**	.023	.067*
56-65	-.026	.040	-.012
66 and over	-.047	.008	.039
Occupational status			
permanently employed	-.013	.001	.011
entrepreneur	.026	.024	-.048
unemployed	-.018	.026	-.006
pensioner	-.034	.033	.003
student	.026	-.056*	.026

* - $p \leq 0.05$, ** - $p \leq 0.01$

Source: Authors' own research

The field of activity showing the strongest statistical link with the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics was improvement in access to public services. Probably because health care is one of the basic public services, this field correlated most strongly with the respondents' age (66 years and over – tau-b = 0.101, at $p \leq 0.001$) and their status of pensioners (tau-b = 0.146, at $p \leq 0.001$). At the same time those two variables were correlated negatively with the choice of improvement in the quality of transport infrastructure (see Table 3). As in the previous case, one can suppose this to be directly connected with the current needs of this category of respondents, for whom the comfort of movement takes a remote place in the hierarchy of needs. Among the other statistically significant interdependences is the relation between having the status of an entrepreneur and supporting entrepreneurship (tau-b = 0.110, at $p \leq 0.001$), between having the lowest level of education and giving priority to fight with unemployment and improvement in skills (tau-b = 0.083, at $p \leq 0.006$), and a negative dependence between the support for improvement in access to public services and higher education (tau-b = -0.086, at $p \leq 0.005$). As with the preferences for the spatial allocation of investment supported from the Community funds, as in the case of the preferred fields of activity, the strength of the link between them and the respondents' socio-demographic features was weak. In most cases it was limited – as

presented above – to the fairly obvious relations following from the specific needs of the given category of residents.

Table 3: Values of Kendall's tau-b coefficient of correlation between the selected socio-demographic variables and the preferred fields of allocation of the European funds

Variable	Improved access to public services	Fight with unemployment and improvement in skills	Improved quality of transport infrastructure	Scientific research	Environmental protection	Support for entrepreneurship
Place of residence						
Town	-.014	-.067*	.055	.000	-.021	.033
Village	.014	.067*	-.055	.000	.021	-.033
Education						
below secondary	.020	.083**	-.036	.002	.050	-.047
secondary	.065*	-.016	.009	.031	-.010	-.013
Higher	-.086**	-.053	.021	-.035	-.031	.053
Age						
25 and under	-.050	-.060*	.044	-.018	.026	.010
26-35	.016	.020	.037	.010	-.059	-.037
36-45	-.047	.032	-.037	.030	.011	.063*
46-55	-.011	.009	.008	.023	.036	-.019
46-65	.064*	-.013	-.030	-.053	.024	-.006
66 and over	.101**	.036	-.074*	-.008	-.054	-.024
Occupational status						
permanently employed	-.002	-.006	-.003	.025	-.003	-.078*
entrepreneur	-.067*	.005	-.005	.027	.051	.110**
unemployed	.003	.049	-.004	-.031	-.019	.014
pensioner	.146**	.014	-.081**	-.026	-.042	-.025
student	-.042	-.036	.060*	-.012	.002	.007

* - $p \leq 0.05$, ** - $p \leq 0.01$

Source: Authors' own research

6. Conclusions and discussion

What motivated the research described in this paper was the underrating of the social perception of the economic development processes and the regional policy in studies conducted so far. This is especially puzzling in the case of the CEE states, in which economic growth has often been accompanied by a deepening of income and socio-economic inequalities (Szlachta and Zaleski, 2010; Domonkos, Ostrihoň and Jánošová, 2013).

The results presented in this article can be systematized in the form of a few fundamental conclusions. The research corroborated the highly positive attitude of the

Poles to the European funds, already reported in earlier studies (Cichocki, 2011; SMG/KRC, 2011; Eurobarometer, 2013), and their conviction about their great significance for Poland's economic development. The significance assigned to them grew with the respondents' educational and occupational status. Their important role was also appreciated by young people and urban dwellers.

The results also show that Poles' preferences as to the places and fields of activity that the funds should go to are to some extent connected with their socio-demographic characteristics. On the other hand, it should be stressed that the statistical links revealed (often coming down to the dichotomy: young, highly educated urban dwellers vs. older, poorly educated, old-age pensioners or the rural unemployed) accounted for a mere few percent of preferences of the given category of the respondents. This observation holds even for such an obvious – one might think – dependence as the relation between living in a town or a village and expecting regional policy to support primarily metropolitan areas and cities or peripheral and rural areas, or opting for no spatial preferences in this respect. The absence of strong statistical relations between the socio-demographic characteristic of the respondents and their preferences for the allocation of the European funds can be accounted for in two non-exclusive ways.

On one hand, this can be due to the lack of well thought-out attitudes towards the funds. Poles, one might conclude, know little about them, do not care about them much (SMG/KRC, 2011), and do not see direct personal advantages deriving from them (Cichocki, 2011). On the other hand, the causes of the poor relation between the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their specific preferences for spending the funds can be sought in a high level of individualization of the attitudes and behavior, described by Bauman (2001) as being typical of the fast modernizing European societies. The individualization of the attitudes can be a challenge to the public authorities taking measures intended to make selected population categories partial to the given fields of allocation of the European funds. Therefore, it seems that public authorities should primarily initiate a public discourse about the allotment of the funds and make efforts to include in it social partners and various representatives of the residents under a policy of citizens' empowerment. This could be a factor breaking the 'culture of distrust' diagnosed by Sztompka (1996). Its scale in Poland is revealed by the results of polls concerning social trust: although only one in four Poles does not trust the European Union (Cichocki, 2011), as many as one in three does not trust local authorities (of a town, a commune), and almost one in two does not trust central authorities, courts, and public administration officials (Swianiewicz *et al.*, 2008; CBOS, 2012).

Finally, the research showed that Poles think the European funds should be spent on somewhat different fields than those chosen, for instance, by representatives of local governments and documented in earlier studies (Kisiąła and Stępiński, 2013). While residents considered 'hard' projects (e.g., investments in transport infrastructure) and 'soft' ones (e.g., improvement in the population's skills) to be equally significant, local authorities tended to give priority to 'hard' projects. These results are in-

interesting because in their classic paper Rodríguez-Pose and Fratesi (2004) found that the concentration of development funds on infrastructure did not lead to significant returns in the 'old' EU. They also documented that only investment in education and human capital brought positive, significant medium-term returns. A similar opinion can also be found in Bachtler and Gorzelak (2007, p. 319), who stated that for the so-called new member countries the main longer-term need was 'to upgrade human and knowledge capital, shifting the strategic focus of intervention away from infrastructure and towards education (including higher education), training, innovation, technology transfer and diffusion'. Thus, an interesting situation seems to have appeared in Poland concerning development preferences: Poles have similar opinions as international experts, while the preferences of local government representatives appear to depart substantially from those of the experts (Kisiąła and Stepiński, 2013). These differences in attitudes towards factors of Poland's regional and local development may generate significant problems in the future by producing difficulties in working out optimum fields and places of fund allocation that would combine both economic efficiency and social acceptability.

The threat described above, despite the lack of adequate research, can pose a problem that may hinder introducing effective and widely accepted regional policy in Poland, and at the same it may also undermine the formation of European identity. It appears that the situation does not concern only Poland but also other EU countries, where the support for the EU membership is significantly lower (Eurobarometer, 2013; Mendez and Bachtler, 2016).

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