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STRATEGIC RESPONSES ON POPULATION AGEING IN REGIONAL POLICY

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Population ageing is one of the key processes affecting the development of European Union countries. The main goal of this paper is an indication of the possibility of collective action against this challenge at the regional level. The article describes assumptions and recommendations for strategic management which take the cooperation of entities from public sector (local governments), market sector (business) and social sector (NGOs) into consideration. Closer analyses will be conducted on two examples of initiatives from European Union: the Regions for All Ages programme and network organization SEN@ER - Silver Economy Network of European Regions. The summary will indicate possible directions of further research.

Key words: regional and local development; strategic management; cross-sector cooperation; silver economy.

1. Introduction

It's important to identify possible actions at regional and local level to tackle the effects of ageing, such as: increased demand for the social services and health sector, investing in the public transport, removing architectural barriers and changes of the structure of the family, consumption, innovation and productivity of the human work. The complexity of these issues requires the development of strategic management and cooperation between local governments, businesses and non-governmental organizations at the regional level. Designated article will show selected solutions and possible directions for the further research.

2. Chosen examples of initiatives in European Union

Searching solutions for taking actions in several dimensions is necessary. The authors of the study titled: „Shrinking Regions" (the study made at the request of European Parliament about related to ageing population issue of depopulation) suggest a series of recommendations for the multilevel management (Katsarova 2008). These are: (1) supraregional (European Union, Member States) - development of statistical indicators for EU policies; equalization of social and economic benefits by the state to the regions; (2) infraregional (local authorities, conurbations) - reorganization of services and welfare facilities and prevention of conflicts through consultation with residents and local

governments; creation of structures and forms of inter-dialogue with the authorities at higher levels; (3) transregional (cross-border and internal border areas) - breaking the barriers of political, legal and administrative provisions on cross-border cooperation, e.g. in the provision of common services in medical, nursing and education.

More detailed solutions have been developed under the two initiatives: (1) *Regions for All Ages* and (2) *SEN@ER - Silver Economy Network of European Regions*. Henceforth only selected findings from the case studies analysis of these projects will be shown.

2.1 *Regions for All Ages* programme

Regions for All Ages programme was an initiative of Age Concern and the English Regions Network (Baker 2007) - the British non-governmental organizations. Initiative was established in 2002 initially for activities in England. From 2005 it was expanded to the European Union level in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions. The starting point was a desire of monitoring the activities and cooperation with the new regional agencies created in 1998-1999 in the UK in order to increase regions efforts to adapt to current demographic changes. Successive stages of *Regions for All Ages* programme were: the establishment of advisory council, identification of stakeholders and research needs, conduct diagnosis and debates, concerted actions and the possible establishment of regional coordination forums on ageing. The principles of cooperation between public authorities and the business environment were also agreed. In the following years a set of tools for preparation of regional strategies, which will also take into account an ageing population, had been prepared. There were discussion sessions at annual conferences of Regional Studies Association and discussions with European Commission and AGE (The European Older People's Platform - NGOs federation) for taking actions to improve account of ageing issues in cohesion reports. These activities led to the establishment of a European advisory board, conduct comparative analysis of regional strategies of all member countries, organization of the European conference and publication of a report containing case studies (Ferry et al. 2006) and expanded set of diagnostic tools (Ferry, Baker 2006).

During *Regions for All Ages* project three main groups of the dilemmas and difficulties faced by regional policy makers focused on ageing was identified (Ferry et al. 2006: 19-20, 48-50). First concerns policy aims – main problem is an ability to recognise which category of people is understood as the „*old*“; how inhabitants of the region define old age; whether the activities should aim only the elderly or also the companies and institutions; how to create balance between the help and the requirements of beneficiaries; and how actions to prevent negative effects of ageing may be associated with raising the competitiveness of the region. The second group is about the methods of designing policies – it’s important to identify the joint and conflicting characteristics between the interventions for the aged in economic growth and social inclusion; what levels should be considered - only educational campaigns or constructing action plans involving local and regional authorities; whether strategies should be incorporated into existing documents or be separate studies or be carried into by particularly established for that purpose

institutions, ombudsmen or agencies. Third group includes problems with implementing policies – it's necessary to recognize how the regional level will be included in the redistribution of resources, choice of policy instruments and mechanisms to deliver outcomes; what conditions will testify to success of the strategy; how strategies and initiatives can mobilize employers, volunteers, older people and the community in the region to further promote active ageing practices; which solutions will be the best to coordinate the activities of various levels of government, its departments and public, commercial and social entities. It should be perceived, that those three difficulties also could be recognized as a research directives - instructions useful for analysis of existing data: planning documents, reports, statistics and projects.

Moreover, four factors leading effective implementation of regional interventions against ageing were identified (Ferry et al. 2006: 46-47). Firstly, political will and democratic mandate - leaders elected in general elections implement strategies better; political support conduces dissemination of ideas, resources' acquisition and concentration of human resources. Secondly, ground-clearing and establishment of the evidence base - creation and implementation of strategy requires deep research about condition of the region and its demographic problems, social services, housing, healthcare and labour market. Thirdly, financial autonomy of regional governments - its absence may limit the independence of actions, choice of instruments and resources to implement the strategy. Fourthly, evaluation arrangements - detailed assessment of deployments effects could lead to further work to improve and enhance the credibility of the government for stakeholders, in particular current and potential private sector partners. It's reasonable to indicate yet another assumption - strategy implementation may be connected with high quality human and social capital of leaders of change and their environment. In particular this regards their education, occupation, skills, interests, involvement in problem solving and collaboration skills.

2.2 *SEN@ER - Silver Economy Network of European Regions*

Different approach is represented by network organization[1] *SEN@ER - Silver Economy Network of European Regions* which was established in 2005 by the Nordrhein-Westfalen government from Germany (Ferry et al. 2006: 31-33, 80-90; SEN@ER 2011). Its main goal is to create and establish the framework conditions for new products and services to improve the lives of older people, and thus providing jobs, employment and strengthen forces of regional economies and their competitiveness. Implementation of this mission involves collaboration with partners from industrial, social and official public authorities.

Nevertheless the foundations for this organization were placed even earlier. Nordrhein-Westfalen was searching for the way to restruct the region - corresponding to the demographic challenge. In 1999 the federal government came out with the initiative „Silver Economy", stimulating the local stakeholders to develop services and products for

[1] Network organization is defined here as „a collection of independent organizations operating in a particular industry but also related with others by co-operation bonds" (Dryl 2010: 251).

seniors to improve their quality of life and create new jobs. P. Enste, G. Naegele i V. Leve (2008: 330-331) claim that: „silver economy should not be regarded as an own economic sector but rather as a cross-section market, in which numerous industrial sectors are involved". Segments of this market include care services, housing adaptations, medical technology, education, culture, service robotics, mobility, fitness, wellness, clothing, insurance coverage and many more. Each region can specialize in different spheres of production and distribution for silver market. After Nordrhein-Westfalen similar strategies began to incorporate several other German states. An important barrier proved to be addressing variety of solutions only to wealthy seniors - for this reason searching for new concepts begun. More goods and services were addressed to consumers from the outside of the region, products were certified and marketing to overall stimulate of seniors lifestyles changes were taken. In 2003 Nordrhein-Westfalen government organized a workshop in Brussels for representatives of local governments and NGOs with inviting them to create a network that would increase the competitiveness of EU regions, exchange their experiences and conduct joint research. In 2005, in Bonn, the first European Silver Economy Conference was held and it was accompanied with the establishment of network. Its key regions are Extremadura (Spain), Limburg and Gelderland (Netherlands), Limousin (France), Mid-East Region (Irlandia) and North West Region (United Kingdom). Also two documents were adopted: declaration which contains main objectives of the network and the agreement of establishing *SEN@ER*, which includes a program for future actions. Moreover a joint secretariat was set up - it's responsible for the coordination, integration and documenting the activities, maintaining contacts with European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, collecting of research results related to silver economy, supporting organization of thematic conferences, a website and recruitment of members of the network.

The cooperation of network members includes: identification of activities that require political support, promoting silver economy idea, integration of professional associations and business organizations, analysis of European Union financial programs, definition of recommendations and joint political declarations. The works also include five „special interest groups" created by the representatives of the network regions and representatives from government, business and NGOs. These are groups for: active employment and entrepreneurship of the elderly, independent living, participation in culture, skill development and regional strategies. *SEN@ER* also runs a database of European Union documents related to silver economy, good practice database, system for searching partners to projects, publishing own newsletter, organizing workshops, annual conferences and competitions to promote best practices in possible product, service and strategic solutions.

Among the selected projects of network are: senior entrepreneurial initiative; work on a computer system to coordinate social services for the elderly, system of smart devices for ageing in place of residence and a mobile alarm for contact with emergency services; system for energy efficiency in social housing; maps of existing Web sites for debates and

exchange of knowledge related to cultural sector; intercultural seniors creativity academy; initiative for active ageing of migrants and ethnic minorities which live in European Union.

Generally, there are four barriers that the construction of regional silver economies may encounter. These are: (1) lack of interest of silver economy and a favorable environment to their actions in the economic entities; (2) limiting the silver economy offers to wealthy older people; (3) a negative pattern of seniors consumption lifestyles; (4) too little attraction force of regions for older migrants. Observed barriers may exist in varying degrees in different regions. Their accurate diagnosis can provide a lot of ideas for policy and development programs makers, as well as the starting point for the various projects of local governments, business and social groups, and their joint operations.

3. Conclusions

The article shows recommendations for strategic management in collective actions against population ageing. The main conclusion from the described examples of initiatives implemented in the European Union - *Regions for All Ages* programme and network organization *SEN@ER - Silver Economy Network of European Regions* - is that the cross-sector cooperation is the key to positive response. Another proposal is that it is necessary to search for solutions aimed at building connections between entities from public sector (local governments), market sector (business) and social sector (NGOs). Public authorities should have a main role in the coordination of activities, but their representatives should also encourage and enable dialogue to reconcile the interests of all stakeholders. They should be stimulated for seeking solutions to accommodate this long-term challenge with their short-term objectives (Ferry et al. 2006: 30, 46). They have also special responsibility to promote positive models and create conditions for the production and use of new resources. Strategies can be designed to build trust, which is a key variety of social capital that defines the opportunities for effective cooperation in solving common problems (Sztompka 2007: 293-300). Interventions should take into account the intergenerational consultations and interests of various age groups (Sáez et al. 2007).

There are at least five possible directions for further research. These are: (1) research on the solutions favorable to the elimination of digital exclusion amongst older people; (2) diagnosis of regional specializations in the silver economy - potential growth sectors and innovations based on the specific region, selected segments of the silver market; (3) analysis of the possibility for stimulating the development of clusters[2] - in particular welfare clusters like *Seniorpolis* in Finland; (4) diagnosis of human and social capital of older people - in silver economy originators and creators of new services, products and technologies may also be important; (5) research on older people's creativity - we need studies on the organizational conditions conducive to creative activity of the elderly and

[2] Cluster is defined here as: „geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries and associated institutions (eg universities, standards bodies and industry associations) in particular fields, competing with each other but also cooperating" (Plawgo et al. 2010: 9).

intergenerational activities in the socio-cultural and educational institutions. These are only some aspects, which can provide an enhanced view to stimulate the unused development potential of the regions and local communities.

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