

URBAN POLICY IN POLAND

Introduction

Urban Policy in Poland is relatively recent. As an independent policy, it was introduced in 2015, with the “National Urban Policy” (NUP). It is the key document at the national level shaping the vision and directions of urban development in Poland. Therefore, it is a reference point for public administration on how to support and strengthen sustainable urban development.

The urban policy objectives are the following:

- To support and strengthen a sustainable urban development
- To strengthen the capacity of cities and urban areas to create sustainable development
- To create and stimulate the job growth
- To improve the quality of life for inhabitants of urban areas

The national administrative system of Poland provides a specific framework for the implementation of the urban policy, but existing administrations at the regional and municipal levels also have a relative freedom in shaping urban action.

1. The national urban Polish policy framework: a part of the development management system

Issues related to urban development in Poland are part of the country development management system based on the **Act on the principles of development policy** from 6 December 2006 (Journal of Laws 2006 no. 227 item 1658).

The main strategic framework for implementing the development policy is provided by **the Strategy for Responsible Development 2020 (SRD) with the perspective of 2030**. The SRD defines the main directions and development priorities, including those concerning sustainable urban development. Nine integrated, thematic strategies and four supra-regional strategies are under the umbrella of the SRD. Among those strategies:

=> **the National Strategy for Regional Development (NSRD)** concerns urban development. **National Spatial Development Concept 2030 (NSDC)** is also part of the Polish development management system. This is the most important governmental strategy for spatial development of the country.

=> **the National Urban Policy 2023 (NUP)** defined in 2015 derives from the NSRD and the NSDC. It sets general aims and directions for urban development; it is a kind of guidebook for public administrations, showing how ministries should acknowledge urban development issues. The Strategy for Responsible Development (SRD) in 2017 adds to the National Urban Policy specifications concerning urban intervention from the national level and numerous strategic projects dedicated to the cities.

2. Focus on the Strategy for Responsible Development and its strategic projects on urban development

2.1 Objectives

The urban dimension of the SRD aims at creating conditions for the sustainable development of urban centres, working out mechanisms of cooperation, strengthening their capacities to create new jobs and improving the quality of life of their residents.

2.2 Intervention areas

The SRD addresses all cities, but it specifically targets:

- Medium-sized cities: those cities often have poor socio-economic results and a significant outflow of people, especially young ones. The SRD recognizes 122 medium-sized cities that will be the beneficiaries of the state's special intervention.
- "Marginalized areas": they are areas where the accumulation of social and economic problems occurs. These are mainly rural areas and smaller towns, which are characterized by a high rate of employment in agriculture, lack of jobs in other sectors and a limited access to services for inhabitants.

SRD focuses also on problems common to all cities, regardless of size, e.g. problems related to revitalization (1/5 of the cities area, inhabited by 2.4 million people, is experiencing degradation processes and requires revitalization), air pollution or uncontrolled urban sprawl.

SRD has also strategic projects, dedicated to the particular objectives that are implemented at the national level.

2.3 Focus on strategic projects supporting this Strategy for Responsible Development at the national level



2.3.1 Support program for self-governments in programming revitalization

Within the SRD strategic project on revitalization, numerous initiatives are implemented and aim at supporting and promoting revitalization in Polish cities. They are part of a "revitalization package".

- Subsidy competition for cities

One of them is financial support (subsidy competitions) for municipalities in preparing and updating their revitalization programs. This activity is currently implemented in cooperation with the Marshal's Offices. This part will be more described in the 3.5 part of this document.

- Model Revitalization project

Moreover, the Ministry of Investment and Economic Development implements the project called Model Revitalization. This initiative supports selected cities in the process of developing revitalization programs and model revitalization activities. In the second stage of the competition, 20 cities were selected which now are implementing the previously developed programs. The character of the project imposes on selected cities the obligation to develop model revitalization solutions, paths to solve problems in 9 thematic areas, and then dissemination of the outcomes and promotion of good practices.

- Pilot projects



Additionally, three cities, mentioned in the Partnership Agreement: Bytom, Łódź and Wałbrzych, receive support in revitalization under the Pilot Revitalization project.

Subsidy competition for cities	Model Revitalization project	Pilot projects	National Knowledge Center on Revitalization
over 1 100 projects	20 projects (cities)	3 projects (cities)	15 000 page views
66,7 mln PLN of subsidy	47,3 mln PLN subsidy	14,5 mln PLN subsidy	50 publications

The achievements and results of undertaken initiatives are disseminated through the National Knowledge Centre on Revitalization, a portal about the new approach to revitalization.

2.3.2 Partnership City Initiative (PCI)

The idea behind the PCI is to support from the national level, thematic networks of cities, where cities themselves identify their most pertinent challenges and work on solutions and recommendations for improvement. The aim is to improve development conditions and support integrated and sustainable development of Polish cities. So far, three networks have been launched: air quality, urban mobility and revitalization, with 34 cities involved. The final result of each network will be the Improvement Plan, which is a document containing a set of recommendations for conducting national policies.

2.3.3 Program for medium-sized cities

The Program aims at supporting medium-sized cities in developing innovative enterprise projects, increasing investment attractiveness for potential investors, improving the quality of human capital, stimulating local economic, social and housing initiatives, and supporting self-government development investments under principles ruling the national programs and the capital instruments of the Polish Development Fund. The Program uses already available and also new financial sources, notably national operational programs funds through dedicated competitions.

3. Focus on the revitalization programme at the regional level

3.1 The concept of revitalization

This concept has been defined by the *Revitalization Act* (October 2015) as a comprehensive process of recovering from crisis situations of degraded areas, through integrated activities for the local community, space and economy, and territorially concentrated. According to the provisions of the Partnership Agreement, revitalization activities are to include communities living in peripheral and degraded areas thanks to the comprehensive revitalization of degraded areas, perceived in the social, economic and spatial dimensions.

There isn't one common set of indicators that municipalities (*gminas*) have to use in their statistical analyses to delimitate a degraded area. However, both the Guidelines on Revitalization and the Revitalization Act, contain a list of negative phenomena in social, economic, environmental, spatial-functional and technical areas that constitute the basis for diagnosing a crisis state and defining a revitalization area. Thus, municipalities usually used comparable indicators to diagnose a degraded area (for example in the social sphere the list of phenomena comprises: unemployment, poverty, crime, low level of education or social capital, low level of participation in public and cultural life).

3.2 Legal framework

In Poland there are 16 voivodships (Regions). The voivodships are decentralised regional authorities with a self-government office called the Marshal's office. The voivodship government, within the scope of its competences, supports revitalization processes planned and implemented by the municipal and rural municipalities of the voivodship. The processes of revitalization in municipalities are implemented on the basis of revitalization programs adopted by the local government.

Poland is currently under a transition period in which revitalization programs can be adopted and implemented on the basis of two legal acts:

- The Revitalization Act
- The Municipal Government Act

The transitional period will last until December 31, 2023. After this date, all revitalization programs will be prepared on the basis of the Revitalization Act.

3.3 Financing notably based on European funds

The Regional Operational Programs 2014-2020 are the main financial source for revitalization at the regional level. If a municipality wants to finance revitalization activities from the EU funds, the revitalization program in which the projects/activities have been included must be compliant with the Guidelines on revitalization in operational programs for 2014-2020. Revitalization activities were not compulsory in ROPs. Nevertheless, in the ROP for Lodzkie, for example, it was quite an important part of the programme, as the revitalization needs were, and still are, substantial.

The Guidelines also imposed an obligation for the Managing Authorities of the regional operational programs (Marshal's offices) to check the compliance of the revitalization programs with the Guidelines. Meeting these requirements allows cities and rural municipalities applying under the investment priority concerning strictly revitalization, but also obtaining preferences when applying for EU funds from other investment priorities.

3.4. Regional authorities role

Coordinating the system of EU funding for revitalization projects, the regional authorities give direction and impulse for effective revitalization processes in municipalities. They check through a strong checking process the compliance with the guidelines on revitalization, which enables municipalities to apply for the EU funds. They also supported municipalities in preparing revitalisation programs offering individual support, regional expertise or thematic conferences.

It was the Region's decision to determine the amount of the allocation for revitalization activities within the Regional Operational Programme. However, the decision resulted from the necessity of complying with the regulatory framework set both at the EU and national levels.

3.5. A regional competition combining European and national funds

Regional authorities can carry out a grant competition in cooperation with the Ministry of Investment and Economic Development.

This grant was designed to support municipalities to prepare or update their revitalization programs targeting degraded areas according to the new rules and principles set in the Guidelines and the Act on Revitalization. As the concept of revitalization has changed some additional assistance for municipalities was necessary. That is why a grant from the TA OP was allocated to the regions to help those



municipalities that wanted to prepare their revitalization programs according to the new rules and then to apply for financial resources under regional operational programs (referred to in 3.3).

According to the rules of the competition, municipalities could get a grant up to 90% of eligible costs for preparing or updating their revitalization programs according to new requirements (85% of the granted sum came from the Cohesion Fund under the Operational Program Technical Assistance 2014-2020 and 15% from the state budget). This competition is a part of SRD strategic projects.

The Ministry of Investment and Economic Development distributed the allocation of the grant between the regions, according to its own algorithm.

Focus on the Lodzkie Region budget

The grant for the Lodzkie Region amounted to 2,07 million PLN (0,48 million euros), which allowed to support 26 municipalities (*gminas*). Eligible costs amounted to 90% of the cost of preparing a revitalization programme.

The main aims of the grant competition are the following:

- Support municipalities in launching processes aimed at revitalization of degraded areas through assistance in the process of developing or updating revitalization programs as basic documents for conducting these processes
- Popularize understanding of revitalization as a process of comprehensive, interdisciplinary transformations aimed at bringing degraded areas out of crisis situations
- Strengthen the municipalities' capacity to create mechanisms of social participation