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# Regional entrepreneurship – research trends and perspectives

## Summary

**DEFINITION OF THE TERM:** Regional entrepreneurship covers the economic activities primarily related to the exploitation of regional resources and to meeting the needs of regional communities. In this sense, entrepreneurship is understood as the drive to create new economic ventures and to actively stimulate the entities operating in a region. Manifestations of regional entrepreneurship are also visible in the form of communities', social initiatives', and local authorities' entrepreneurial attitudes.

**HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM:** The first part of this section examines the role of entrepreneurship in regional development; the second part discusses contemporary challenges to entrepreneurship in regional policy, which include the entrepreneurial discovery process and the concept of an entrepreneurial region.

**DISCUSSION OF THE TERM:** The first part of this section presents the determinants of entrepreneurial development in a region; the second part analyses both the role of Business Environment Institutions [Instytucje Otoczenia Biznesu] in stimulating regional entrepreneurship and the support offered for regional entrepreneurship by local government units.

**SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:** Regional entrepreneurship is shaped by the attitudes and behaviours of business entities, local authorities, and regional communities; it is also shaped by state authorities in terms of introducing relevant legislation and eliminating factors that hinder business activity.

In Poland the level of entrepreneurial activity varies from region to region. The following are recognised as determinants of regional entrepreneurship: the demographic characteristics of the region, the economic structure of the region, the regional labour market, the quality of human capital, the importance of entrepreneurs in the region, infrastructure equipment, the standard and availability of housing stock, and cooperation between economic partners in the region. The development of entrepreneurship regionally requires extensive support which is provided by regional policy but is also determined by a civil society that is aware of its responsibility for its region and of the importance of building a regional identity.

**Keywords:** regional entrepreneurship, determinants of regional entrepreneurship development, entrepreneurship in regional development, instruments for stimulating regional entrepreneurship

## Definition of the term

Entrepreneurship is an interdisciplinary concept characterised by great complexity and multifacetedness. The literature does not offer a clear-cut definition of this concept, and it is interpreted from many perspectives, mostly economic, technological, social, and cultural. Entrepreneurship can also be defined as follows (Makiela, 2008, p. 9):

- a process as an act of building and creating something new, i.e., a new economic entity. Entrepreneurship is treated as an organised process of activities that under given conditions is dedicated to the exploitation of an innovative idea in order to achieve benefits in the market. The ability to seize opportunities and chances and to calculate risks are important in this process;
- a set of characteristics that describe a person's behaviour and conduct. In this approach, entrepreneurship is characterised by activity, dynamism, a propensity to take risks, adaptation to changing conditions, and the identification and exploitation of opportunities;
- innovation, which is related to the introduction of novelty and improvement. It applies to both technology and various areas of everyday life. Therefore, any novelty and improvement concerning products, processes, values, and phenomena can be considered innovative (Makiela, 2008, p. 9).

This section will concentrate on regional entrepreneurship at the level of administrative units, which in Poland are voivodeships, communes, and districts, as researchers primarily focus on these regional units.

Regional entrepreneurship is defined as economic activities primarily related to the exploitation of regional resources and to meeting the needs of regional communities (Lisowska 2013, p. 39). In this sense, entrepreneurship is understood as the drive to create new economic ventures and to stimulate the activity of entities operating in the region (cf. Strużycki, 2011; Makiela, 2008). Thus, a region can promote creative individuals and build local interest groups and social groups that work for the public good. In this process, an important role is played by local government units, whose task is to strengthen the competitive position of the region and its economic entities by providing modern technological, social, and institutional infrastructure and creating an entrepreneurial climate (Makiela, 2013, p. 26).

Regional entrepreneurship covers the activities of economic entities and their owners, the entrepreneurial attitudes of regional communities and local authorities' entrepreneurship, and social initiatives that contribute to regional development in the form of civic-type institutions, e.g., associations and social committees. Animators, also called leaders of regional initiatives, engage in meeting the needs of inhabitants of a region and supporting their economic activity; they also play an important role in regional entrepreneurship. What also matters is the cooperative relationship between companies and regional authorities, as this shapes economic policy and represents the interests of both the business community and the region (Strużycki, 2011, p. 103).

The objectives of regional entrepreneurship include: (i) increasing the innovation and competitiveness of the region's economy; (ii) building regional identity; (iii) stimulating cooperation between science and business; (iv) increasing the competitiveness and innovativeness of regional companies; and (v) equal opportunities for development and support for structural changes in the region (Makiela, 2013, pp. 26–29).

## Historical analysis of the term

### The role of entrepreneurship in regional development

Entrepreneurship has always been recognised as a key factor of socio-economic development in spatial systems of different scales, i.e., international, national, regional, and local (Rachwał, Płaziak, 2015, p. 37). Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in the economy, including regionally, and contributes to increasing its competitiveness and improving the quality of life of its inhabitants. This development is substantially influenced by local communities deciding which business to do and where to do it.

Thus, entrepreneurship at the regional level is a vital factor in activating a region's economic and social development through innovative activities, increasing competitiveness, and the efficient exploitation of available resources. The regional level is characterised by a certain amount of innovativeness, competitiveness, and an entrepreneurial climate; it can also be treated as an environment for people, economic

entities, and other institutions. Each region has its own economic, cultural, intellectual, innovative, institutional, and environmental potential, as well as its own characteristics that may determine its investment attractiveness (Makieła, 2013, pp. 20–21).

Entrepreneurship performs important functions in regional economies, including: (Glinka, Gudkowa, 2011, pp. 53–55):

- stimulating the development of the region by establishing and developing new companies, creating new jobs, initiating and implementing innovative solutions, as well as stimulating competitiveness and the activity of its inhabitants;
- exploiting resources and ensuring the efficiency of markets through the entrepreneurial creation of production factors, which at the same time determine the directions of market development. In this context, the ability to collect and process the market information that is necessary for decision-making and for building a competitive advantage is of particular importance;
- shaping market flexibility through pro-active, entrepreneurial attitudes in order to quickly react to negative phenomena occurring in the region's economy, e.g., quickly adjusting the market offer to changes in demand;
- a positive impact on the environment, which can manifest in the economic and social spheres. A successful entrepreneur, called a local leader, can create jobs, encourage the establishment of new related ventures, and stimulate the activity of the local population;
- providing benefits for investors – companies that operate regionally use investor capital to ensure their growth. Investors will benefit from a high rate of return on their investments, which may attract further investors to the region.
- shaping the flexibility of markets – entrepreneurship is a crucial market adjustment mechanism; entrepreneurs identify and exploit emerging market opportunities, which allows them to promptly respond to changes in demand by being adaptable.

Regional entrepreneurship is one of the main driving forces behind regional competitiveness; it strengthens the process of absorption of developmental factors linked to regional specificity. Regional competitiveness is stimulated by improving the quality of life in a given area

and by activities whose aim is to stimulate economic activity, which is dependent on the entrepreneurial behaviours of regional communities and local authorities. Thus, conditions conducive to establishing and running a business are important, as economic entities operating regionally reduce unemployment by creating new companies and jobs, supplying the local market with goods, and providing services to local communities.

## Contemporary challenges for entrepreneurship in regional policy – the entrepreneurial discovery process and the entrepreneurial region

Undoubtedly, entrepreneurship has a significant impact on the competitiveness and innovativeness of economies and regions, as is highlighted in EU and national strategic documents on regional policy. Regional Innovation Strategies (RIS) introduced a new model of regional governance in response to the Europe 2020 strategy, which focused on the search for the smart specialisation of regions through the entrepreneurial discovery process. Smart specialisation consists in selecting key areas of science and the economy that have regional potential, as well as supporting a region in its development, which is based on its endogenous potential through increased innovation and the competitiveness of its specialised enterprises (Oleksiuk, 2015). The smart specialisation strategy is based on the assumption that no region is a leader in every field. The key, therefore, is to notice the unique potential of a region and exploit it to build this region's competitive advantage in a given field. This approach is particularly beneficial for regions that are not science and technology leaders, as they are able to make greater long-term gains by focusing their potential on key areas where they have adequate resources (Foray, 2015).

The selection of a region's smart specialisation should be supported by the entrepreneurial discovery process, which is a model for finding new sources of regional growth by systematically observing, identifying, and evaluating new trends in business and technological innovations. The aim of this process is to bring innovative solutions to the market

by developing creative solutions to problems while exploiting available resources, taking risks, experimenting, looking for new ideas within the value chain, and joining new value chains (Oleksiuk, 2015). This process requires the involvement of socio-economic partners, including entrepreneurs, and the integration of R&D initiatives in the region. Entrepreneurs are assigned a leading role in identifying regional areas for future specialisation. Their knowledge allows them to target areas for the competitive and innovative exploitation of regional resources, environmental conditions, and their knowledge of the market. Smart specialisations are specific 'economic areas' based on scientific and R&D potential developed in the region. In this sense, the aim of regional smart specialisations is to achieve excellence in a specific field and a 'critical mass' in key areas and sectors in order to allow regional companies to compete in global markets. Regional authorities also play a significant role in stimulating the development of regional smart specialisations through: (i) supporting innovation-friendly business environment institutions; (ii) building innovative clusters that support regional development; (iii) supporting education in the area of research and innovation; (iv) initiating cooperation between science and business; and (v) building modern research infrastructure.

The concept of entrepreneurial regions is linked with the EU's European Entrepreneurial Region (EER) project, which rewards EU regions and cities for outstanding and innovative entrepreneurial strategies (three Polish regions have received this award: Małopolska, Gdańsk and Pomerania, and the Silesian Voivodeship). The formation and functioning of such regions are influenced by many factors, including the components of their macroeconomic environment (i.e., their economic, legal, political, technological, international, and social dimensions), the geographical location, and the quality of the education system. An entrepreneurial region is characterised by the following (Płaziak & Rachwał, 2015, pp. 44–45):

- an entrepreneurial vision defined in strategic documents;
- innovative and competitive companies capable of developing in a turbulent environment;
- a well-developed network of efficient business environment institutions which support entrepreneurship in the region;
- a system of strong links between actors of socio-economic life;

- educational institutions that implement educational programmes aimed at encouraging creativity and entrepreneurial attitudes;
- high-quality human capital,
- high-quality leadership and co-governance as well as efficiency in acting and in creating an entrepreneurial climate.

In an entrepreneurial region, entrepreneurship is a way to gain and maintain a competitive advantage, and the continued development of an entrepreneurial region has an impact on its positive image. A regional identity is created, which can lead to an increase in its attractiveness as a place to invest and live (Płaziak, Rachwał, 2015, p. 45).

## Discussion of the term

### Determinants of regional entrepreneurship development

The development of regional entrepreneurship is influenced by many factors, not only those from the macro- and micro-environment but also from the meso-environment (i.e., the regional environment). The meso-environment covers determinants that affect regional entrepreneurship while accounting for the specificity of the region. These determinants include demographic factors (e.g., the number of inhabitants and their demographic structure), factors that shape the population's purchasing power and demand (e.g., the size and structure of the population's income), the education level of the population, the skills and qualifications they possess, the socio-economic infrastructure of the local system, the resources and attributes of the natural environment, economic potential, institutional resources, local legislation, and investment capital (Lisowska 2013, pp. 93–94).

The meso-environment can be analysed from two perspectives: subjective and objective. The subjective perspective covers public administrative units (e.g., local government) and entities that offer service infrastructure for conducting economic activity (e.g., business environment institutions). The objective perspective covers (i) financing institutions (e.g., banks, guarantee funds, leasing companies); (ii) local government institutions; (iii) institutions of economic local government

(e.g., chambers of commerce and employers' unions); (iv) scientific and educational institutions; (v) institutions that support the development of entrepreneurship (e.g., regional development agencies, business incubators, and consulting and training companies); and (vi) specific groups of influence (e.g., local communities) (Wach 2008, pp. 34–35). Other determinants of entrepreneurial development in a region include factors that affect decisions related to the choice of company location, such as the economic potential of the region, a well-functioning business environment, transport and technological infrastructure, the availability of capital and highly qualified labour, investment attractiveness, promotion of the region, and the standard of living of the local community (which affects demand) (Lisowska 2013, pp. 93–94).

When looking for a place to conduct their activities, business entities choose locations that best suit their needs. For example, manufacturing companies can decide on a peripheral location if they have easy access to resources there, while service and retail companies choose locations beneficial from the point of view of market size and demand. Another relevant aspect in the development of regional entrepreneurship is whether and how regional authorities create conditions favourable for the establishment and operation of businesses in the region through relevant economic, social, and cultural policies. Encouraging public trust in the local and state authorities and raising the cultural level and quality of life of society are also important (Zioło, 2015, p. 9). The development of regional entrepreneurship is also fostered by the political situation in a country and the cooperation of its political leaders, who should strive to achieve the fundamental objective of shaping a modern region or local system in line with contemporary trends in civilizational development (Zioło, 2015, p. 20). The list below summarises the above-discussed determinants of regional entrepreneurship development (cf. Wach, 2008; Lisowska, 2013; Zioło, 2015):

- geographical location and natural resources of the region;
- cultural and natural assets of the region;
- socio-economic development of the region;
- investments in the region;
- knowledge and technology transfer in the region;
- access to capital and financial support, including access to public aid;
- quality of human capital;

- political and social systems;
- quality of political elites (legislative and executive);
- internal political situation (the dynamics between political forces);
- relations between society and authorities (the level of trust);
- local government policy – creating a climate for business development;
- standard of living of the local community;
- cooperation of companies in the region, e.g., in the form of clusters;
- intensity of the development of the business environment;
- professionalisation of business services;
- attitude and commitment of regional authorities;
- the appropriate level of technological and social infrastructure.

### Support for regional entrepreneurship provided by local government units

The development of regional entrepreneurship requires local authorities to provide appropriate supportive policies, especially those targeted towards business entities operating in the region. These policies should be implemented through support instruments offered by local government units, which are usually divided into two categories: revenue instruments and expenditure instruments. The first category includes the following (cf. Makiela, 2008; Lisowska, Filipczak, Siuda, 2016):

- fiscal policy instruments;
- instruments related to the disposal or use of available assets;
- pricing policy instruments;
- instruments related to the economic development of the environment;
- instruments related to state aid revenues.

Expenditure instruments include:

- investment expenditures which improve the investment attractiveness of a regional unit, particularly infrastructure investments (e.g., expenditure on the construction and maintenance of roads, water supply networks, energy infrastructure, and education and health care infrastructure);
- expenditure on supporting business environment institutions (e.g., financing business incubators, technology and industrial parks, loan funds and loan guarantees);

- expenditure on public aid (e.g., grants, loans, guarantees, and loan guarantees);
- expenditure on information and promotion.

Taking into account the main areas of support offered to regional entrepreneurship by local government units, the following groups of instruments and activities undertaken by these units can be distinguished (Gancarczyk, 2010):

- technical infrastructure – providing a high level of technical infrastructure (e.g., roads, utilities), facilitating the acquisition of premises/real estate, leasing existing or creating new facilities in the areas of production, trade, and services, as well as introducing special economic zones into the local spatial development plan;
- institutional infrastructure (business environment institutions) – creating institutions that stimulate entrepreneurship and innovativeness in the region, e.g., training and consulting centres, business incubators, industrial and technological parks; creating network links in the form of clusters;
- financing – granting tax concessions, loan guarantees, loans, grants, creating loan funds and guarantee funds;
- use of EU funds – initiating projects addressed to entrepreneurs; providing ongoing information on available EU funds; training and counselling for entrepreneurs; encouraging entrepreneurs to initiate joint projects; creating databases of projects implemented by local entrepreneurs;
- R&D – launching research and development institutions that stimulate innovative processes in companies; investing in R&D infrastructure with a view to implementing highly innovative solutions;
- education and training – co-financing training and education directed at developing entrepreneurial skills; providing business consulting services;
- information – creating a system of access to information and public services for entrepreneurs, including on-line services; creating platforms for information exchange; organising informational meetings with entrepreneurs;
- promotion – undertaking promotional activities (fairs, exhibitions, conferences); engaging entrepreneurs in social and cultural initiatives; collecting and disseminating information about companies

that operate in the region; promoting entrepreneurship in the regional media.

These instruments, which influence the development of regional entrepreneurship, differ between regional units, depending on the local environmental conditions.

## The role of Business Environment Institutions in stimulating regional entrepreneurship

Business environment institutions play a significant role in stimulating regional entrepreneurship. They are an element of the regional environment (meso-environment) and are organisations whose aim is to implement specific activities in a voivodeship, commune, or district in order to stimulate entrepreneurial activities and innovation in the region, which would, in turn, increase regional competitiveness. The infrastructure of regional entrepreneurship support consists of entrepreneurship centres, innovation centres, and nonbank financial institutions (Lisowska, Filipczak, Siuda, 2016).

Entrepreneurship centres are entities involved in broadly understood business promotion and incubation, both of which aim to create economic entities and jobs and to support the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Entrepreneurship centres include the following (Mażewska, Bąkowski, Rudawska, 2021, pp. 21–22):

- training and consulting centres, which undertake training, advisory, and information activities. Their task is to undertake activities directed at developing entrepreneurship and improving the competitiveness of regional economic entities. They take part in various initiatives whose aim is to improve the economic potential and living standards of the local community;
- pre-incubators – these are entities that offer support for individuals planning to start their own businesses. These entities are most often established within universities, where they prepare students, doctoral students, academics, and graduates for practical action in the market; they also offer the knowledge and skills transference necessary for running a business;
- business incubators – these are distinct organisational entities with their own premises that provide comprehensive support

programmes (called business incubation programmes) for budding entrepreneurs. These programmes support entrepreneurs from the inception of a business idea until it achieves market stability. The length of a company's stay in an incubator should be three to five years, after which the entrepreneur should reach maturity and the ability to function independently in the market.

Innovation centres are entities involved in supporting the innovativeness of companies. Such centres include the following (cf. Lisowska, Filipczak, Siuda, 2016; Mażewska, Bąkowski, Rudawska, 2021):

- Centres for Technology Transfer – these are an organisationally diverse group of not-for-profit advisory, training, and information units that implement programmes that support technology transfer and commercialisation, as well as all the tasks that accompany this process;
- Academic Incubators of Entrepreneurship – these are created in universities and offer support to students, doctoral students, and academics in starting their own businesses;
- Technological Incubators – these provide support to innovative projects or highly innovative start-ups in the form of shared technological infrastructure, including hardware, office space, and laboratories;
- e-incubators – an adaptation of the idea of entrepreneurship incubators for the digital economy. Their aim is to help online businesses develop;
- parks: technological, scientific, research, industrial, and technological parks as well as techno-parks. These are scientific and industrial complexes whose aim is to help new high-tech companies. Support is offered in the form of services at the building and development stage of a company, including counselling, technology transfer, commercialisation of research results, and provision of appropriate scientific and research infrastructure;
- Innovation Centres – entities that cater to the needs of companies by becoming engaged in their development and by introducing new technological products and services into the market.

Nonbank financial institutions are not-for-profit entities that can provide capital in repayable or non-repayable form for the needs of newly established micro- and small enterprises. Such entities include the following (Mażewska, Bąkowski, Rudawska, 2021, pp. 18–20):

- regional and local loan funds, which are institutions that offer repayable support instruments to micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises that operate on the market, or to individuals who plan to start their own business activity;
- guarantee funds, which are not-for-profit parabanking entities that support regional businesses.

The activities of business environment institutions are very important for the development of regional entrepreneurship. Thanks to the support they provide, business entities develop in terms of their competitiveness and innovativeness, the investment attractiveness of the region improves, and socio-economic development takes place.

## Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

### Development challenges for regional entrepreneurship

It has been proven and is widely known that entrepreneurship is the driving force behind regional socio-economic development. In the business sphere, entrepreneurship is identified with micro- and small enterprises that skilfully exploit regional resources operationally in the regional market in order to meet the needs of the local community. Regional small and medium-sized enterprises reduce unemployment in the local labour market and positively affect the lifestyle and quality of life of entrepreneurs and company employees, which can consequently lead to economic and social stabilisation and improvements in the living conditions and wealth of regional communities.

In the public sphere, entrepreneurship is understood as the ability of local authorities to seek innovative changes that generate new sources of revenue in order to achieve greater efficiency. The entrepreneurial behaviour of local authorities depends on a number of factors, including (i) the creativity and innovativeness of these authorities, which is evidenced by the application of modern concepts of regional management; (ii) the ability to cooperate with businesses in order to create a business climate; (iii) the ability to inspire regional actors; and (iv) the ability to cooperate with other local government units and organisations, e.g.,

those that are part of Business Environment Institutions (Makiela, 2008, p. 17). However, the activities of local authorities are limited, in particular by their budget, the size of which depends on the statutory arrangements for their tasks. However, local authorities can indirectly stimulate regional development processes, e.g., through tax exemptions, local reliefs, preferential sales of land and premises to entrepreneurs, and the creation of relevant infrastructure (Huczek, 2015, p. 252).

The level of entrepreneurial activity in Poland varies regionally. Factors that affect the level of regional entrepreneurship include the following (Makiela, 2013, pp. 14–17; Lisowska, 2013, pp. 89–90, Huczek, 2016, pp. 252–253):

- demographic characteristics of the region;
- the situation in the regional labour market;
- the economic structure of the region;
- the network connections of regional actors, both internally and externally (e.g., business environment institutions, universities, and social institutions);
- entrepreneurship of self-government authorities, which is manifested in the maturity of management (e.g., building management structures based on public-private partnerships, creating the right conditions for doing business, and shaping a positive investment climate);
- organisational culture of self-government administration, manifested by its effective actions;
- local governments' concern for the region's competitive position, expressed by supporting the development and specialisation of local enterprises to strengthen their market position;
- concern for social values and a high standard of living for the regional community by creating institutions that promote the region; concern for social relations; concern for developing regional elite structures;
- increasing the dynamics of the regional economy by supporting regional entrepreneurship and innovation;
- human capital, which depends on the demographic situation of the region, the current level of education of the inhabitants, and their access to educational services;
- social capital, understood as social activity, building ties between social groups, and various forms of entrepreneurship;

- material capital, which comprises tangible goods (which are an expression of production potential and the basis for economic activity), natural resources, the state of the natural environment, and technical infrastructure;
- financial capital, i.e., financial resources that can be used for new investments and come from, e.g., local government units, companies, and EU funds;
- the flow of knowledge between the economy and science, which adds new specialist dimensions to the region.

Regional entrepreneurship is shaped by the attitudes and behaviours of business entities, local authorities, and the regional community, as well as state authorities in terms of introducing relevant legislation and eliminating factors that hinder business activity.

The development of regional entrepreneurship requires regional policy to provide extensive support and to develop a regional identity built by a civil society that is aware of its responsibility for its region. This support should be targeted at:

- development of business environment institutions in the region that provide professional informational, counselling, training, and financial services to companies;
- creation of conditions for the development of cooperation between the scientific sphere and business;
- construction of regional programmes for the development of entrepreneurship;
- development of entrepreneurship education directed at fostering entrepreneurial attitudes in the regional community;
- development of professional services for business (e.g., exhibitions, entertainment, medical services);
- creation of regional scientific centres and R&D institutions that stimulate innovative processes in companies;
- development of the technical infrastructure necessary to conduct business in the region;
- promotion of the region.

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