

SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES AS AN INSTRUMENT SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERIPHERAL REGIONS IN POLAND – THE EXAMPLE OF THE PODLASKIE VOIVODESHIP

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The existence of disparities in the socio-economic development of regions in Poland is a significant issue in the modern economy. In 1994, special economic zones were established. These are designated areas of the country where economic activity can be conducted under preferential terms. The paper highlights the significance of the Suwałki Special Economic Zone (SSEZ) in the context of the development of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, a peripheral region. **Methods:** The functioning of the SSEZ was presented in detail, focusing on the effects of the SSEZ's activities, including the number of permits issued, the size of investments, and the level of employment. Public statistics and data obtained from the SSEZ for the years 2012–2023, as well as the results of a survey (CAWI) conducted in 2024 among employees of one company operating in the SSEZ, and an interview (CAPI) with a representative of the local authorities, were used. **Results:** The research results indicate that the SSEZ had a significant positive impact on the economic development of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, including attracting numerous investments that contributed to increased employment and improved technical infrastructure. The benefits of the SSEZ's activities are evident at the local level. **Conclusions:** Investments in special economic zones have a multiplier effect, generating increased local demand for other services. Monitoring the effects of economically privileged areas may help develop effective instruments to stimulate the socio-economic development of peripheral regions in the future.

Key words: interventionism, Suwałki Special Economic Zone, regional development, peripheral region, Podlaskie Voivodeship

JEL codes: H25, H30, J21, R10

INTRODUCTION

A characteristic feature of regional development in Poland is its high degree of diversity, with significant developmental disparities evident on multiple levels.

The reasons for these differences vary, but they are mainly rooted in historical circumstances (Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska, 2012). At the same time, it highlights existing spatial disparities, with a particular emphasis on the less developed eastern part of Poland. The paper

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concerns the development of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, which, due to its characteristics, is considered a peripheral region (Kozak, 2014). The Suwałki Special Economic Zone (SSEZ) has been operating in the Podlaskie Voivodeship since 1996 and is an instrument of the state's regional policy. It provides various incentives for economic entities operating in a selected location, supporting both businesses and the region's development. This paper emphasizes the significance of the SSEZ in the context of the Podlaskie Voivodeship's development as a peripheral region. Peripherality is an ambiguous and complex concept (Proniewski, 2014). The peripherality of regions can be considered, among other things, from a spatial perspective (when a region is characterized by its distance from economic centers and poor transport accessibility resulting from difficult geographical or political conditions) and from a socio-economic perspective (when a region is characterized by low economic development, lack of capital, and outflow of labor resources). Peripherality is also important in socio-demographic terms, which is related to low population density, depopulation, an aging population, and the migration of young and educated people (Miszczyk, 2010).

The study provides a detailed description of the SSEZ's functioning, focusing on its impact in the peripheral region, including the number of permits/decisions issued, the size of investments, and the level of employment. The local level was also taken into account, showing the various effects of the zone on local development, which is clearly underrepresented in the literature (Stojčić et al., 2022). Existing studies on the operation of SSEZs in Poland (Ambroziak, 2009) focus on descriptive analyses based on case studies (Ciżkowicz et al., 2015), the objectives of their creation (Cicha-Nazarczuk & Nazarczuk, 2017), but they do not analyze the actual impact of the zones on improving the overall situation in the region and on the local market. The aim of the study was to determine the importance of the Suwałki Special Economic Zone for the socio-economic development of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The following research tasks were formulated: (1) to present economic zones as an instrument of interventionism in regional development; (2) to identify the effects of the SSEZ on the development of the voivodeship:

permits/decisions granted, investment outlays, jobs created, and investment structure; (3) to determine the significance of the SSEZ in the local context, i.e., in the assessment of employees working in a company operating within the zone and the authorities of one of the communes in which the zone is located. It is assumed that the impact of SSEZs on the development of peripheral regions is multidimensional; in addition to land use and job creation, there are other effects that are important for local development.

SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES IN POLAND AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SUPPORTING REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Special economic zones (SEZs) in Poland were established based on the act of 20 October 1994 on special economic zones (Ustawa z dnia 20 października 1994 r. o specjalnych strefach ekonomicznych). This act defines SEZs as separate areas within the country where economic activity can be conducted on preferential terms. The creation of SEZs in Poland was a response to the challenging socio-economic situation that followed the political transformation in 1989 (Ciżkowicz et al., 2015), which included high unemployment rates (Jensen & Winiarczyk, 2014). Some regions adapted to the new conditions, but in many others, economic development problems grew, including high unemployment, business failures, and a lack of capital. Regional and local authorities were unable to solve these problems on their own, prompting the state to intervene and create SEZs.

The creation of privileged economic zones in Poland is a manifestation of state interventionism in development processes (Żminda et al., 2017), which is understood as a system of state economic policy based on direct government involvement in the economy on a macro scale, utilizing a variety of instruments. The main tools of interventionist policy include, among others: state investment projects aimed at increasing employment without increasing the supply of goods and services, subsidies to unprofitable enterprises, protectionism in foreign trade, and monetary and fiscal policy (Winiewicz-Bosy, 2009). A special economic zone is a designated area within a country where economic entities are subject to specific eco-

conomic conditions that are more favorable than those generally applicable in the country (Budzanowski, 2008; Buonocore et al., 2023). From an economic perspective, the zone is one of the instruments of the state's regional policy, which establishes various facilities for domestic and foreign companies to operate in a designated location. It is therefore a form of state aid for both regions and entrepreneurs (Cieśliewicz, 2012). On an international scale, SEZs are geographically separate areas managed by autonomous entities that offer favorable investment conditions (Zioło, 2009; Arbolino et al., 2026). SEZs vary in size, structure, objectives, and management models, including industrial, commercial, technological, and free customs zones. Originally, SEZs were established for a period of 20 years from the date of their establishment; however, this term was later revised, and according to current assumptions, SEZs will operate in Poland until the end of 2026 (Informacja, 2024). Various scenarios for supporting economic activity in the regions are being considered for the future, including extending the operation of economic zones or integrating them with other forms of investment support.

The purpose of establishing SEZs was to accelerate economic development in Poland by attracting foreign investors, mainly through the creation of preferential tax policies, especially in regions perceived as unattractive for investment (Żminda et al., 2016). The assumption was that economic development could be supported by developing specific areas of economic activity, introducing new technological solutions, and expanding exports. The zones were also intended to reduce growing structural unemployment and contribute to the effective use of existing industrial infrastructure (Kryńska, 2000), improve the competitiveness and innovation of the national and regional economy (Nelec & Prusek, 2006), and promote integration with international markets. A significant impact on quantitative and qualitative changes in the areas covered by the zones was assumed (Miłaszewicz, 2011). Previous studies (Ambroziak, 2009) show that, in practice, SEZs have a significant impact on regional economic development in Poland (Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska et al., 2023), contributing to increased regional competitiveness and supporting the restructuring and modernization of industry.

The first economic zone in Poland, Euro-Park Mielec, was established in 1995 on the site of a former aircraft factory, which had previously been severely affected by the reforms (Siudak & Wątorrek, 2011). By 1 January 1998, 17 SEZs had been established in Poland, but one zone did not commence operations (special economic zones in Częstochowa), the Mazovia Special Economic zone was liquidated due to a lack of investor interest, and two zones (Tczew and Żarnowiec) were merged. Currently, there are 14 economic zones covering 22,949.5 ha (as of 31 December 2024). It should be emphasized that the act on special economic zones (Ustawa z dnia 20 października 1994 r. o specjalnych strefach ekonomicznych) has been amended numerous times, primarily to adapt its provisions to European Union standards and changing economic realities. However, the main objectives of the SEZ remain unchanged. Management of the zone may be entrusted only to a joint-stock company or a limited liability company in which the majority of votes at the general meeting or shareholders' meeting are held by the State Treasury, regional government, or other managing entity. Subzones are also created within SEZs and on the land they manage. Each zone operates in accordance with a development plan drawn up by the minister responsible for the economy (currently the Minister of Development and Technology). Business activity in an SEZ is permitted through a permit, an administrative decision issued by the zone's management board on behalf of the relevant minister. The permit entitles entrepreneurs to enjoy the privileges of the zone, i.e., relief and exemption from local taxes (on real estate), total exemption from income tax for 10 years, and partial exemption for the remaining period, as well as access to land prepared for investment. The permit specifies detailed conditions regarding employment, investment, deadlines, and eligible costs. Support and rules for granting public aid depend on the location of the investment and the size of the enterprise.

A significant change was the establishment in 2018 of the Polish Investment Zone (PIZ) (Ustawa z dnia 10 maja 2018 r. o wspieraniu nowych inwestycji), which extends the existing SEZs to the entire country. In addition to the territorial expansion, new rules for investment support were introduced. Instead

of the permits they have received so far, entrepreneurs receive decisions on support. The support decision specifies the conditions related to the investment, including minimum investment expenditure, the number of new jobs, and the qualitative and quantitative criteria that the entrepreneur must meet. Decisions are issued for a fixed period of up to 15 years. Public aid may range from 10% to 70% of eligible costs, depending on the size of the enterprise and the location of the investment. Until the end of 2026, both systems will operate in parallel. The empirical part of the study considered both the effects of the SEZ and the PSI on the SSEZ under study.

METHODS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH AREA

The following data sources were used in this study: data obtained from the Suwałki Special Economic Zone (current as of 30 November 2023), data published by the Ministry of Development and Technology 2012–2023 (Informacja, 2012–2024), and data obtained from the Local Data Bank (Statistics Poland). Additionally, the results of surveys conducted in 2024 among SaMASZ sp. z o.o. employees, a company operating in the Suwałki Special Economic Zone in the Zabłudów commune, in the machinery industry, were utilized. The company was deliberately selected for the study due to its significant importance for the region's economy and the local labor market (over 800 employees in 2024). The surveyed company manufactures agricultural machinery and has been operating on the market since 1984 (including in the SSEZ on the basis of a permit from 2016) and implements investments in innovative solutions concerning, among others, production processes and manufactured products. Information obtained from company employees can supplement knowledge about effects of the SSEZ's activities and its impact on local and regional development. A survey using a computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) was conducted among all company employees in 2024. Results were obtained from 34 people, i.e., approximately 4.3% of the total number of employees in the surveyed company, which limits the possibility of generalizing the results. To understand the effects of the SSEZ from the local government's perspective, a CAPI interview

was conducted in 2024 with a representative from the local authorities, specifically the commune located within the SSEZ area.

The study covers the Podlaskie Voivodeship, located in the northeastern corner of Poland (Fig. 1). The region boasts unique natural and cultural assets, as well as significant development potential; however, it has been facing numerous economic and social challenges for years. The Podlaskie Voivodeship, along with four other voivodeships, is part of Eastern Poland, a macroregion identified by the European Commission in 2007 as requiring special financial support under the Cohesion Policy. This is evidenced by the low GDP (in 2007, GDP per capita was 74.1% of that of Poland, and in 2002, it was 77.6%) and high unemployment; the registered unemployment rate in the Podlaskie Voivodeship in 2007 was 10.4% (Statistics Poland). In addition to its peripheral location in relation to the central and western parts of the country, the region is characterized by underdeveloped transport infrastructure, a low degree of industrialization, and insufficient investment, which affects the region's competitiveness compared to other voivodeships. The area is peripheral both spatially, as it is located on the external border of the country and the European Union, and socio-economically, due to factors such as lower GDP per capita indicators compared to other voivodeships, low investment attractiveness, and issues with population outflow. The Suwałki Special Economic Zone (SSEZ) has been operating in the Podlaskie Voivodeship since 1996. Its scope covers the entire Podlaskie Voivodeship, two counties of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship (Ełk and Gołdap) and four counties of the Mazowieckie Voivodeship (Łosice, Ostrów, Sokółów, and Węgrów). Both the area of the SSEZ and the level of development underwent changes during the analyzed period. In 2023, its area was 662.9506 ha, and the share of developed areas was 85.8% (Informacja, 2024).

The establishment and operation of the SSEZ is an important instrument for supporting and stimulating regional economic development by offering preferential conditions for investors, including tax breaks and other forms of support, which in turn is intended to assist in the creation and development of businesses, the creation of new jobs, and the development of infra-

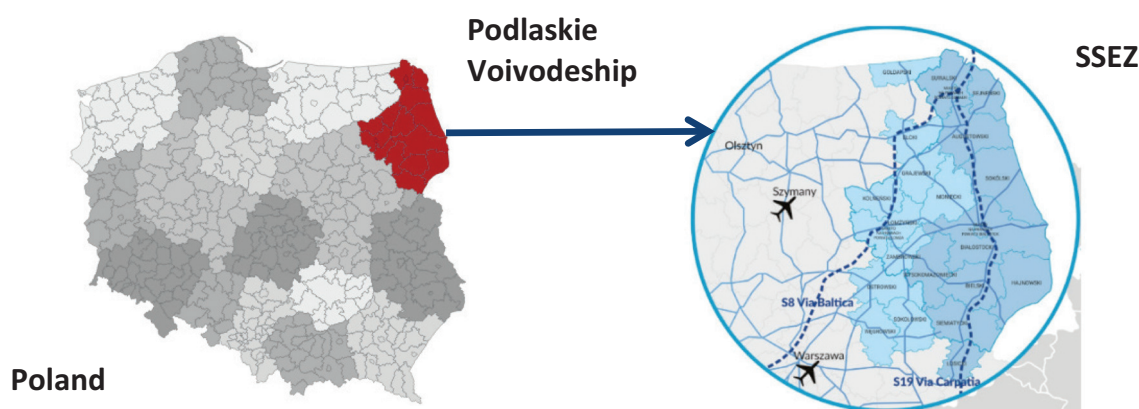


Fig. 1. The scope of the Suwałki Special Economic Zone (SSEZ)

Source: own study based on Polish Investment and Trade Agency (n.d.) and Suwałska Specjalna Strefa Ekonomiczna S.A. (n.d.) data, <https://www.paih.gov.pl/>; <https://ssse.com.pl/>

structure. The SSEZ is a partnership project involving both state and local authorities, which hold almost 60% of the shares in the company. Among the entities conducting business activity in the zone, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises dominate, with large enterprises accounting for only 28% of the total.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regional perspective

To assess the effects of the SSEZ, an analysis of indicators for the years 2012-2023 was conducted, including the number of new and valid permits/decisions supporting business activity, the value of capital expenditure, and the number of jobs. The analysis of the data (Table 1) shows a stable increase in investment expenditure in the SSEZ, both on the basis of permits and decisions on investment support (since 2018). The decline in the number of valid permits since 2019 is a consequence of permits expiring by operation of law and the lack of new permits for operations in the zones. The SSEZ was characterized by a relatively high increase in investment expenditure compared to other zones and an increase in expenditure compared to the previous year (except for 2016). This indicates growing interest among companies in investing in the SSEZ and a positive impact on the economy of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The effects of the SSEZ's activities

are evident in the labor market (Fig. 2). An analysis of changes and dynamics in retained and new jobs during the review period reveals positive trends. In 2023, 9,272 people were employed in the SSEZ. The number of jobs reported is related to the validity of permits; for example, in 2016, the decrease of 746 jobs was caused by the expiry of 27 permits. Another decrease occurred in 2022–2023, which was due to a reduction in employment, caused in part by an increase in inflation in Poland and, consequently, an increase in business costs.

When analyzing the number of jobs in the SSEZ, it should be borne in mind that investments made in these areas create demand for employment in the vicinity of the zone (Żminda et al., 2017) – demand is generated for various types of services: financial services for companies, logistics and transport services (including local companies), and a revival in construction services due to the need to develop and prepare the land for investment and the construction of new facilities (Krzemiński, 2009). Furthermore, investments in zones have multiplier effects (Ambroziak, 2009) as they increase local demand for other types of services, such as catering, security, workwear laundry, or various outsourcing services (Godlewska-Majkowska, 2009), which may not yet be developed in peripheral regions. It can therefore be concluded that the actual number of jobs created through special economic zones is significantly higher than the statistical data suggest.

Table 1. Effects of the functioning of the Suwałki Special Economic Zone in 2012–2023

Specification	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of valid permits	65	71	81	89	79	92	106	96	89	85	83	78
Number of new permits (or support decisions since 2018)	10	11	16	8	19	15	23	14	20	36	13	23
Capital expenditure incurred [PLN million]	1,581	1,608	1,745	2,079	1,941	2,500	2,877	3,042	3,187	3,367	3,533	3,684
Growth rate (previous year = 100%) [%]	99	102	109	119	93	129	115	106	105	106	105	104

Source: own study based on information on the implementation of the act on special economic zones as of 31 December 2012–2023 (Informacja, 2012–2024) and data obtained from SSEZ.

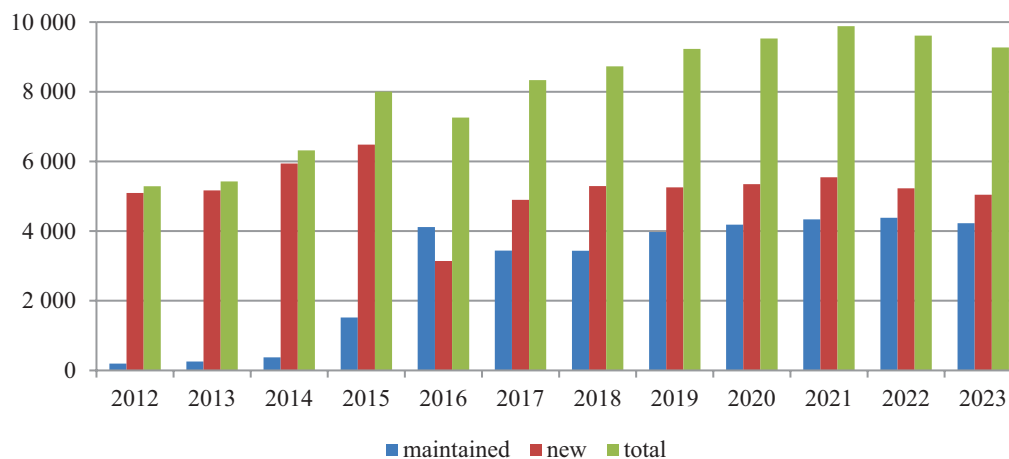


Fig. 2. Number of jobs in the Suwałki Special Economic Zone in 2012–2023

Source: own study based on information on the implementation of the act on special economic zones as of 31 December 2012–2023 (Informacja, 2013–2024) and data obtained from SSEZ.

Between 2012 and 2023, the share of Polish capital in the SSEZ's investment structure increased significantly from 49.5% to 78.6%, indicating the strong involvement of domestic investors in the zone's development. Among the largest Polish investors, in 2023, there were: Tanne, Pfeleiderer MDF Grajewo, Padma (from the wood industry), and Bison (metal products). In terms of capital invested, Germany and Denmark were among the leading investor countries until

2017. Since 2018, the share of German capital has decreased in favor of other countries, i.e., Sweden and Denmark, whose shares were 9.3% and 7.7%, respectively. The largest Swedish investor is Rosti Poland (plastics), while the largest Danish investor is Rockwool Polska (building materials). The industry structure of investments in the SSEZ is dominated by companies from the wood industry (Fig. 3), whose share ranges from 30.5% to 36.4% of the total value

of investments in this zone. Other dominant industries include the manufacture of rubber and plastic products, as well as metal products.

The activities of the SSEZ are also noticeable from the perspective of technical infrastructure development in the region, especially during the initial stage of operation (Konopelko, 2013). The most significant investments carried out by SSEZ between 2012 and 2023 include the construction of storm-water and sanitary sewage systems in Suwałki, as well as the extension of local streets. Larger infrastructure projects are typically carried out in cooperation with local governments and utility providers, such as the construction of sanitary sewage systems, water supply networks, telecommunications networks, road surfaces, sidewalks, bicycle paths, parking lots, and lighting in Białystok between 2016 and 2019. The city of Białystok has developed investment areas using funding from the Regional Operational Program of the Podlaskie Voivodeship for 2014–2020. The investment significantly contributed to attracting investors to the SSEZ, as well as increasing the number of investments in the region and creating new jobs.

The significant effects of the SSEZ's activities in the context of peripheral region development include promotional activities that focus on organizing training courses, seminars, and webinars aimed at both entrepreneurs operating within the zone and potential investors. Representatives of the zone regularly participate in national and international investment fairs and economic conferences. Brochures, folders, reports,

and other promotional materials are prepared, containing information about available investment areas, tax breaks, and the benefits of investing in the zone. SSEZ conducts promotional activities on the Internet, managing its website and social media profiles, which facilitate communication with investors and promote the zone's achievements. This influences the perception of the Podlaskie Voivodeship as a business- and investment-friendly location, which in the long term may improve its attractiveness and investment competitiveness (Walkiewicz, 2017).

SSEZ also conducts extensive activities in the field of vocational education, cooperating with secondary schools (vocational schools, technical schools) in Suwałki and Białystok, as well as with universities, including the Szczepanik State Higher Vocational School in Suwałki and the Białystok University of Technology. The most important initiatives implemented in cooperation with schools include: scholarships for students of technical fields; organization of classes and lectures for pupils and students to encourage young people to consciously plan their educational and professional paths; support for regional competitions aimed at promoting vocational education, and the organization of press conferences promoting vocational education with the participation of school representatives. In addition, SSEZ co-organizes career, job, and education fairs, and companies from the zone sponsor selected fields of study at vocational and technical schools.

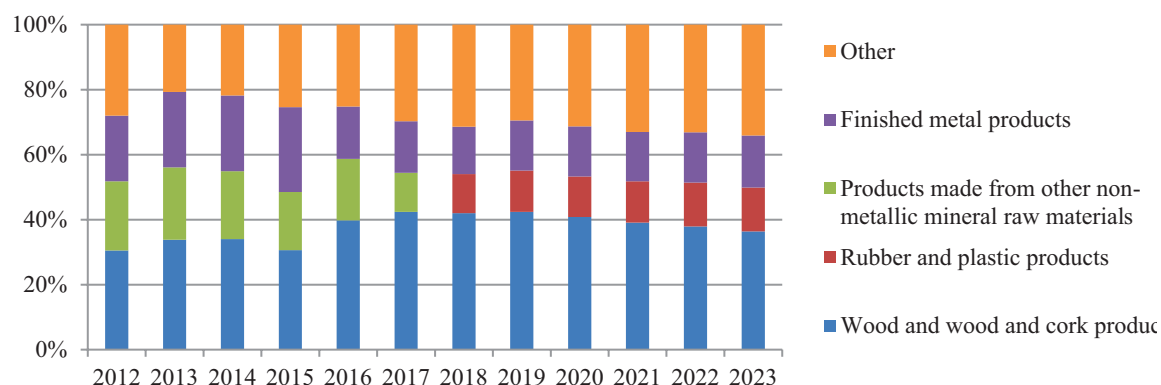


Fig. 3. Industry structure of investments by leading industries in the Suwałki Special Economic Zone in 2012–2023

Source: own study based on information on the implementation of the act on special economic zones as of 31 December 2012–2023 (Informacja, 2013–2024) and data obtained from SSEZ.

SSEZ supports the development of clusters by being a member of the following clusters: Metalworking Cluster (Evoluma Industrial Cluster) and Polish Construction Cluster (status of National Key Clusters) as well as Grajewo Entrepreneurship Cluster and Polish Wood Cluster. Clusters play a crucial role in integrating businesses, scientific institutions, and research and development units, promoting the exchange of knowledge and the implementation of innovative projects in the region.

Local perspective

A survey conducted among employees of a company operating in the SSEZ was completed by 34 people, 83% of whom were men. The respondents were mainly city dwellers (65%), 47% had secondary education, and 41% had higher education.

Employees of the surveyed company were asked for their opinion on the importance of the SSEZ's functioning and its impact on the living conditions of the inhabitants of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, as well as the expected effects that the zone should generate. The results are presented in Figure 4.

According to the surveyed employees, the SSEZ has had a decisive impact on the local labor market, the development of technical infrastructure, and the development of new technologies. The zone is therefore perceived

as an effective tool for job creation, which is a key factor in regional development. The respondents also pointed to the significant importance of the zone for the growth of the voivodeship's residents' incomes and their living conditions. However, the results obtained may suggest that the economic benefits of the SSEZ's activities are not equally felt by all residents. The respondents also note the impact of the SSEZ's activities on shaping the image of the Podlaskie Voivodeship.

According to the surveyed employees (67.6%), salaries in companies operating within the zone are not higher than in companies outside the zone. The lack of differences may result from the wage policy of specific companies, the specifics of the regional labor market, or the type of industry. The respondents indicated that working conditions in the SSEZ are not better than outside it (44.1% of responses, with 26.5% having no opinion). A total of 91.2% of respondents are satisfied with their current employment and expressed their willingness to be re-employed, which may indicate good working conditions, attractive remuneration, opportunities for professional development, or a positive work atmosphere.

Respondents were asked whether, in their opinion, the SSEZ had fulfilled its role in accelerating the economic development of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The vast majority of respondents, i.e., 91.2%,

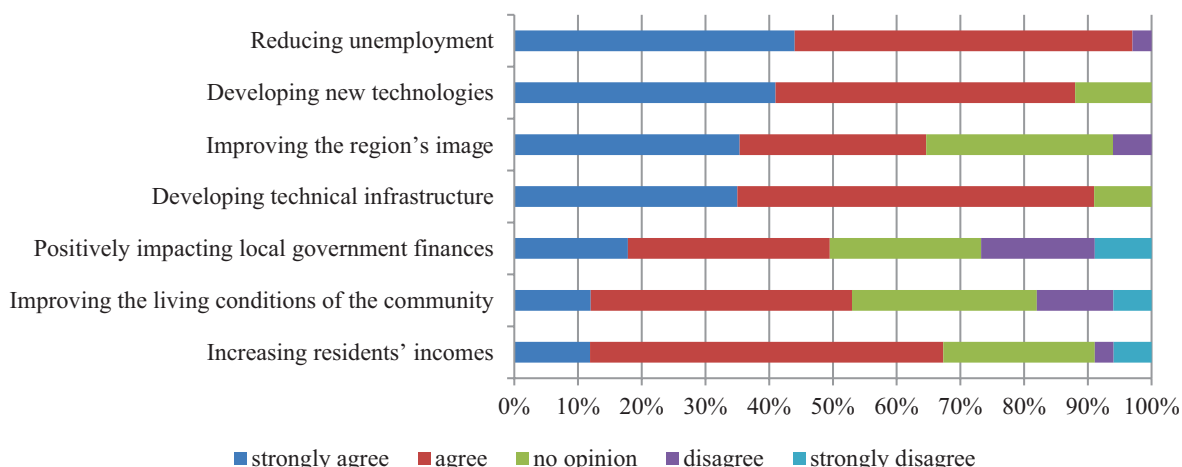


Fig. 4. The impact of the Suwałki Special Economic Zone on the development of the Podlaskie Voivodeship as assessed by company employees

Source: own research.

stated that the SSEZ had fulfilled its role, which gives a positive image of the SSEZ and its impact on the region's development.

Respondents were asked to indicate other effects of the SSEZ. The results obtained earlier (Fig. 4) were confirmed by the answers to this question, as 74% of respondents indicated a reduction in unemployment or the creation of new jobs. In addition, the following effects were noted: attracting new investors and promoting business development, new investments, technological advancements (Pastusiak, 2011), subsidies supporting business development, increased tax revenues, and the expansion of technical and road infrastructure. This confirms the conclusions from the literature that the effects of the zones are mainly positive, although not always very strong (Hirasuna & Michael, 2005; Ciżkowicz et al., 2015). It should be emphasized that negative effects associated with the functioning of zones were also noted (Billings, 2009), although these were mentioned much less frequently (21% of respondents). These included a lack of or reduction in tax revenues to the budget, the concentration of companies in one place and environmental pollution, unfair competition, companies "escaping" to economic zones, and increased car traffic.

An interview with a representative of the local government of a commune within the SSEZ also revealed various effects of the SSEZ's operation at both regional and local levels. From the local government's perspective, the SSEZ's impact on the quality of life of residents through the development of technical infrastructure (roads, power grids, and water supply networks) is significant. However, it should be remembered that the investments made in connection with the SSEZ generate additional maintenance costs, which require local governments to carefully plan and manage local finances. From the perspective of local authorities, it is crucial to increase revenue from taxes and other fees, which strengthens local government budgets (even despite initial tax exemptions for entrepreneurs) and provide long-term financial benefits through various redistribution mechanisms. The research also pointed to the introduction of innovative technologies by companies, which contributes to raising the technological level of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Employees gain new skills, which increases their ability

to compete in the market. The commune authorities have drawn attention to the potential risk of excessive dependence of entrepreneurs on large economic entities, which is particularly dangerous in situations where a large entity leaves the region, such as due to changes in economic or political conditions. Currently, due to the geopolitical situation and the war in Ukraine, some entities located in the SSEZ have lost a significant portion of their markets in Eastern Europe, which may have implications for companies cooperating with them.

The results obtained in terms of effects confirm the findings of other authors. However, it is worth emphasizing that, despite the dynamic development of economic zones in Poland over recent years, there remains relatively little empirical research analyzing the actual effects of zones on development at the regional and local levels. Most of the available literature is limited to basic statistical descriptions or determines the impact of SEZs on direct employment and unemployment levels (Cicha-Nazarczuk & Nazarczuk, 2017). The results confirm the conclusions from the literature on the significant role of SEZs in employment growth (Ciżkowicz et al., 2015), at the local level (Szmidt, 2016), and in attracting foreign investment (Jensen & Winiarczyk, 2014; Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska et al., 2023). Based on the research, it can be concluded that the SSEZ has a positive impact on the development of the Podlaskie Voivodeship, which is a peripheral region. The impact of the zone can be observed on multiple levels of local development, confirming the initial assumption. The SSEZ contributes, among other things, to economic growth, job creation, infrastructure development, and the strengthening of human capital (Hajduga, 2014). It should be emphasized that the activities of the SEZs are positively perceived at the local level; our own research shows that residents and local authorities are aware of the effects of their operation. To capture the full picture of the impact of SSEZs on the region under study, it is necessary to consider a broader range of enterprises. When analyzing the results of the research, it should be emphasized that some authors suggest that the strength of the effects of economic zones depends both on pre-existing regional economic conditions (Goss & Phillips, 2001;

Mayneris & Py, 2013) and on the specific characteristics of the zones (Bondonio, 2003; Cicha-Nazarczuk & Nazarczuk, 2017; Frick & Rodríguez-Pose, 2023). This highlights the necessity of ongoing monitoring of the functioning of SEZs and their impacts, including any negative effects (Typa, 2016), within the context of regional development.

CONCLUSIONS

The establishment of the Suwałki Special Economic Zone in the Podlaskie Voivodeship aimed to attract investment, create new jobs, and improve the overall economic situation of this peripheral region. Companies operating within the SSEZ have had a significant impact on job creation and on stabilizing the local labor market. Residents now have greater employment opportunities in various industries, not only within the zone, but also with partners and cooperators operating outside the zone. Additionally, foreign investment has emerged in the region, indicating that investors appreciate the region's attractive investment conditions. The investments carried out within the SSEZ necessitated expanding technical infrastructure, which, in the long term, may contribute to the further development of the region and enhance its competitiveness. The research has revealed that the benefits of the SSEZ are also visible at the local level and are multidimensional. In addition to the effects on the labor market, these initiatives include enhancing the region's image as an attractive investment destination, promoting the development of vocational education in the region, and increasing the income of residents and local government units.

The study has certain limitations, including limited access to data describing the effects of the zone. Our research allows us to draw conclusions from a local perspective, but the small sample size analyzed is a significant limitation that prevents us from generalizing the results to the entire SSEZ. In addition, the study utilized data for the SSEZ, which covers an area slightly larger than the Podlaskie Voivodeship. Future studies should focus on further monitoring the effects of economically privileged areas, covering a wider local scope, e.g., more enterprises, which may help shape new, effective instruments to stimu-

late the socio-economic development of peripheral regions. It is also important, especially for the region near Poland's eastern border, to consider the context of the war in Ukraine and its impact on companies operating in the SSEZ.

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SPECJALNE STREFY EKONOMICZNE JAKO INSTRUMENT WSPARCIA ROZWOJU REGIONÓW PERYFERYJNYCH W POLSCE – PRZYKŁAD WOJEWÓDZTWA PODLASKIEGO

STRESZCZENIE

Cel: Występowanie dysproporcji w rozwoju społeczno-ekonomicznym regionów w Polsce stanowi kluczowy problem współczesnej gospodarki. W 1994 roku utworzono specjalne strefy ekonomiczne, będące wyodrębnionymi obszarami, na których działalność gospodarcza może być prowadzona na preferencyjnych warunkach. W pracy pokazano znaczenie działania Suwalskiej Specjalnej Strefy Ekonomicznej (SSSE) w kontekście rozwoju województwa podlaskiego jako regionu peryferyjnego. **Metody:** Przedstawiono szczegółowo funkcjonowanie SSSE, koncentrując się na efektach działania SSSE, w tym liczbie wydanych zezwoleń, wielkości inwestycji oraz poziomie zatrudnienia. Wykorzystano dane statystyki publicznej oraz dane pozyskane z SSSE za lata 2012–2023, a także wyniki badań ankietowych (CAWI) przeprowadzonych w 2024 roku wśród pracowników jednego z przedsiębiorstw działających na terenie SSSE oraz wywiadu (CAPI) z przedstawicielem władz lokalnych. **Wyniki:** Wyniki badań wskazują, że SSSE miała znaczący pozytywny wpływ na rozwój gospodarczy województwa podlaskiego, m.in. przyciągnęła liczne inwestycje, które przyczyniły się do wzrostu zatrudnienia i poprawy infrastruktury technicznej. Korzyści z działania SSSE są widoczne na poziomie lokalnym. **Wnioski:** Inwestycje realizowane w specjalnych strefach ekonomicznych przynoszą efekty mnożnikowe poprzez generowanie zwiększonego lokalnego zapotrzebowania na inne rodzaje usług. Monitorowanie efektów działania obszarów uprzywilejowanych gospodarczo może pomóc w przyszłości w kształtowaniu skutecznych instrumentów pobudzania rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego regionów peryferyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: interwencjonizm, Suwalska Specjalna Strefa Ekonomiczna, rozwój regionalny, region peryferyjny, województwo podlaskie