

# Exploratory Study on Absorption and Investment of European Union Structural Funds 2007–2013 by NUTS 2 Level Self-Governments in Poland

**Joanna Rakowska**

Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland

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## Abstract

*The article provides information on geographical distribution of European Union structural funds among Polish regions (voivodships) analyzing it from various points of view: various kinds of funds, their purposes, amount per inhabitant, as well as the value, structure and types of investments co-financed from EU structural funds obtained by regional authorities—i.e., Voivodship Self-governments under Operational Programmes 2007–2013, as of 31 December 2014.*

**Keywords:** operational programmes 2007–2013 in Poland, NUTS 2 self-governments

## Introduction

Structural disparities between European Union regions were the reason for establishing regional and cohesion policies aimed at evening the levels of socio-economic development at NUTS 2 level. This objective of economic and social cohesion introduced in 1986 with the adoption of the Single European Act, was significantly strengthened by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and recently by Lisbon Treaty, declaring that “the European Union shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States”<sup>1</sup> EU structural funds are the main measures of implementing these policies. They are allocated in eligible regions<sup>2</sup> of Member States (Rakowska 2014) in subsequent programming periods under agreed operational programmes (OP). Through co-financing activities aimed at “harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of economic activities, the development of employment and human resources, the protection and improvement of the environment, and the elimination of inequalities, and the promotion of equality between men and women”<sup>3</sup> structural funds are to reduce economic, social and territorial imbalances between EU regions.

EU structural funds are of vital importance for Poland, which in the 2007–2013 programming period obtained nearly EUR 67,9 billion<sup>4</sup> from this source (Przedsiębiorczość w Polsce 2013). It has been highlighted in reports that EU structural funds are a considerable assistance for the Polish

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1. See: Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007. Official Journal of the European Union, C 306/01, 17 December 2007.

2. By the general rule governing Objective 1 of EU cohesion policy they are allocated in NUTS 2 regions where GDP per capita is lower than 75% of EU average GDP per capita. Polish NUTS 2 met this criterion both in 2004–2006 and 2007–2013.

3. See: Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/99 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds; Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999. OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25–78; Regions and Cities for Growth and Jobs: An overview of Regulations 2007–2013 on Cohesion and Regional Policy. Inforegio Factsheet 2006; Cohesion Policy 2014–2020. Investing in Growth and Jobs. Luxembourg 2011.

4. [In the journal European practice of number notation is followed—for example, 36 333,33 (European style) = 36 333.33 (Canadian style) = 36,333.33 (US and British style).—Ed.]

economy in the times of regional and global crises, and enterprises and territorial self-governments make up the group of beneficiaries who carry out projects of the biggest total and EU funding values. Since Poland's accession in 2004 till the end of 2013 all its regions had GDP per capita below 75% of average EU GDP per capita, which made them eligible for implementation of OP co-financed by EU structural funds. OPs 2007–2013 implemented in Poland can be divided into three types. The first includes OPs which covered the whole country. The second comprises one multiregional OP and the third 16 Regional OPs (ROPs). The multiregional programme Development of Eastern Poland covers five voivodships (NUTS 2 regions) which are warmińsko-mazurskie, podlaskie, lubelskie, świętokrzyskie and podkarpackie. They are situated in the north-eastern and eastern parts of Poland. Based on GDP<sup>5</sup> per capita value, all these voivodships were classified as the poorest regions of EU-25,<sup>6</sup> constituting the most economically lagging EU macro region (Rakowska 2014) until the next EU enlargement in 2007. The economic condition of Eastern Poland resulted in developing an OP especially for this macro region. Regional Operational Programmes were another new solution implemented in 2007–2013. Each of these programmes was adjusted to the particular development needs and bottlenecks of one individual voivodship and addressed only to potential beneficiaries from one particular NUTS 2.

Consequently, EU structural funds 2007–2013 were allocated in Poland under four nationwide OPs<sup>7</sup>—i.e., Infrastructure and Environment Operational Programme (IEaOP), Human Capital Operational Programme (HCOP), Innovative Economy Operational Programme (IEOP), Technical Assistance Operational Programme (TAOP), under one multiregional Development of Eastern Poland OP (DEPOP),<sup>8</sup> Programmes of European Territorial Cooperation and 16 Regional Operational Programmes,<sup>9</sup> (i.e., Dolnośląskie ROP, Kujawsko-Pomorskie ROP, Lubelskie ROP, Lubuskie ROP, Łódzkie ROP, Małopolskie ROP, Mazowieckie ROP, Opolskie ROP, Podkarpackie ROP, Podlaskie ROP, Pomorskie ROP, Śląskie ROP, Świętokrzyskie ROP, Warmińsko-mazurskie ROP, Wielkopolskie ROP and Zachodniopomorskie ROP). Different EU funding opportunities offered by each of the above mentioned OPs were addressed to a wide range of potential beneficiaries. Spatial and thematic differentiation of absorption of EU funds by different groups of beneficiaries, including local and regional self-governments, is one of the main subjects of economic research on supporting local and regional development by EU structural funds (Drejerska and Kołyska 2009; Milewska 2007; Pomianek 2006; Powęska 2008; Rakowska 2010, 2011, 2013b; Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska 2012, 2013; Zając, Wojewódzka, and Stawicki 2009).

Regions in Poland play an active administrative and economic role in regional development policy.<sup>10</sup> They are responsible for making an effective use of both endogenous development potential and exogenous factors supporting economic development (Heller and Bogdański 2013). As EU structural funds 2007–2013 have been one of the most important exogenous sources of financing local and regional development, there is a question on regional self-governments' participation in their allocation. Thus the aim of this elaboration is to define the participation regional<sup>11</sup> self-governments in the absorption of EU structural funds allocated in Poland under Operational Programmes 2007–2013, considering both the value and number of projects carried out by them as well as the kinds of investments carried out by regional self-governments and co-financed from EU structural funds.

5. The role of GDP as an indicator of development has been recently discussed in Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, GDP and beyond. Measuring progress in a changing world, COM/2009/0433 final, Commission of the European Communities

6. See: Eurostat data at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>.

7. Programming documents are available from the website of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development at <https://www.mir.gov.pl/strony/zadania/fundusze-europejskie/>.

8. Programming documents are available from the website of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development at <https://www.polskawschodnia.gov.pl/>.

9. Programming documents for All ROPs are available from the website of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development at <https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/wszystkie-serwisy-programow/>.

10. See: Ustawa z dnia 5 czerwca 1998 r. o samorządzie województwa. DzU z 1998 r. nr 91 poz. 576.

11. In this paper the term “region” and “regional” is used as a synonym of voivodship and NUTS 2, in accordance with the EU classification of territorial units for statistical purposes (Rakowska 2013a, 49).

## 1 Methodology

The analysis is based on the quantitative secondary data from the Central Statistical Office of Poland and qualitative and quantitative secondary data from the National Information System SIMIK, run by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development, which is the Polish implementing agency for operational programmes 2007–2013. As of 31 December 2014, the SIMIK system registered 104 710 contracts for co-financing projects from EU structural funds allocated in Poland under all OPs 2007–2013. The SIMIK entry for each contract (project) includes both qualitative and quantitative data. The first type of data includes the number and title of the contract (project), name of the OP and of the priority axis, the address and profile of the beneficiary, including (e.g., the type of legal entity). The latter data includes the total value and EU funding for each project. The database enabled extraction of all projects carried out by beneficiaries defined as “voivodship self-governments” and “marshal offices”<sup>12</sup>, upon which basis the following could be determined:

- the share that regional authorities have had in the total number and value of contracts, value of EU funding total and by individual OP
- the total EU funding obtained by each regional self-government and under each individual OP
- the main types of investments co-financed from structural funds 2007–2013 carried out by regional self-governments

## 2 Results

Based on KSI SIMIK data (as of 31 December 2014)<sup>13</sup> beneficiaries in Poland signed 104 527 contracts for projects co-financed by EU structural funds under Operational Programmes 2007–2013. Total value of these projects equalled PLN 507,75 billion, of which 56,2% (i.e., PLN 285,5 billion) came from EU structural funds. Regional self-governments were granted EU funds under nationwide, multiregional and regional operational programmes, except for TAOP and European Territorial Cooperation. Consequently, they signed 1 576 contracts of total value 20,5 billion PLN, of which 74,3% (PLN 15,1 billion) from EU structural funds. Contracts signed by regional self-governments made up 1,5% of all contracts, while the total value of self-governments’ contracts amount to 4% of the total value of all projects and for 5,3% of total EU co-financing obtained by all beneficiaries in Poland in 2007–2013 (tab. 1).

Regional self-governments absorbed very different amounts of EU funding from nationwide OPs (tab. 2). Most contracts were signed by these beneficiaries under HCOP (432) and much fewer under IaEOP (9) and IEOP (4). And under HCOP regional authorities invested mostly in training, courses and postgraduate studies increasing participants’ chances in the labour market and improving competences of regional self-government clerks. Many projects aimed at implementation of IT and management systems, as well as at establishing and supporting Regional Territorial Observatories, Observatories of Labour Market, Observatories of Social Policy and Regional Policy, etc. Structural funds obtained under IaEOP co-financed purchase of railway trains, modernisation of hospitals and a musical theatre as well as landfill reclamation, while under IEOP projects efforts were funded preventing digital exclusion and actions supporting development of tourism.

Voivodship self-governments’ share in total value of EU funding obtained by all kinds of beneficiaries is rather insignificant in the case of IaEOP (0,4%) and IEOP (0,3%), however they make a considerable amount of transfers, correspondingly PLN 520017 thousand and PLN 119006 thousand. The share of 5% in total EU funding under HCOP equals PLN 2198235 thousand, and nearly 24% participation in EU funding under DEPOP equals PLN 2566793 thousand.

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12. Marshal’s Office, although listed in KSI SIMIK separately, is a budget unit of regional self-government and as such is treated herein as self-government.

13. According to the “ $n + 2$ ” or “ $n + 3$ ” rule, the co-financing from the EU Structural Funds under Operational Programmes 2007–2013 can be paid to beneficiaries up to two or in certain circumstances even up to three years after the end of the programming period, i.e. till the end of 2015 or 2016. Thus the analysed data for the OPs 2007–2013 is as of December 31, 2014.

**Tab. 1.** The number, total value and EU funding of projects carried out by regional self-governments under Operational Programmes 2007–2013

Self-government of	Number of projects	Total value (PLN thousand)	EU co-financing (PLN thousand)	EU co-financing in total value (%)
Dolnośląskie	69	1 020 774	765 945	75,0
Kujawsko-pomorskie	162	1 396 795	976 701	69,9
Lubelskie	107	2 170 571	1 621 523	74,7
Lubuskie	100	580 153	470 780	81,1
Łódzkie	83	986 185	754 824	76,5
Małopolskie	129	444 078	380 140	85,6
Mazowieckie	102	1 438 807	1 141 331	79,3
Opolskie	92	876 826	699 614	79,8
Podkarpackie	134	2 120 904	1 572 594	74,1
podlaskie	45	1 300 330	1 073 188	82,5
Pomorskie	89	1 237 942	849 892	68,7
Śląskie	80	1 516 079	976 393	64,4
Świętokrzyskie	95	1 150 288	792 376	68,9
Warmińsko-mazurskie	87	1 701 815	1 314 801	77,3
Wielkopolskie	139	1 601 031	1 096 318	68,5
Zachodniopomorskie	63	917 995	709 565	77,3
Total	1 576	20 460 571	15 195 985	74,3

Source: Author's elaboration based on SIMIK MiR data

**Tab. 2.** Regional authorities' share in the number of contracts, in the total value of projects and in EU funding under nationwide OPs and Development of Eastern Poland OP 2007–2013

Operational Programme	Number of all contracts	Total value (PLN thousand)	EU funding (PLN thousand)	Voivodship Self-governments' share (%) in: <sup>b</sup>		
				Number of all contracts	Total value of projects	Total EU funding
Infrastructure and Environment	2 998	225 336 686	119 959 037	0,3	0,4	0,4
Innovative Economy	18 053	82 947 684	38 947 831	0,0	0,2	0,3
Human Capital	47 527	52 928 700	44 147 194	0,9	4,9	5,0
Development of Eastern Poland (multiregional)	311	15 123 681	9 971 383	9,3	23,8	25,7

Source: Author's elaboration based on SIMIK MiR data

<sup>a</sup>based on the number of contracts signed by all beneficiaries

<sup>b</sup>based on the number of contracts signed by all beneficiaries defined in SIMIK as voivodship self-governments and Marshal Offices

The Development of Eastern Poland OP covered five voivodships and was a source of co-financing only for beneficiaries from these NUTS 2. They carried out 29 projects of total value PLN 3 598 825 thousand, of which 71% amounting to PLN 2 566 793 thousand came from EU structural funds. Within these investments regional self-governments carried out 7 projects aiming at modernisation and construction of roads, 5 projects titled broadband network of Eastern Poland, 6 projects called “bike routes” in Eastern Poland, 3 projects of liquidation of development barriers — a bridge on the Vistula river connected with a voivodship road, one regional bridge, construction of four scientific and technological as well as conference and congress centres. Regional Operation Programmes 2007–2013 are another source of EU co-financing. Comparison of the regional self-governments' participation in the total number of contracts and in EU funding obtained under regional operational programs indicates no relationship between these values (tab. 3).

**Tab. 3.** Regional self-governments' share in the total number of contracts and in EU funding obtained from Regional Operational Programs 207–2013

Regional Operational Programme of	Total <sup>a</sup> (= 100%)		Voivodship self-governments' share (%) in: <sup>b</sup>	
	Number of contracts	EU funding (PLN thousand)	Number of contracts	EU funding
Dolnośląskie	2 841	5 092	2	15
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	3 956	4 082	4	24
Lubelskie	3 999	4 829	3	34
Lubuskie	1 119	1 967	9	24
Łódzkie	2 831	4 325	3	17
Małopolskie	3 051	5 514	4	7
Mazowieckie	5 035	7 339	2	16
Opolskie	1 509	2 040	6	34
Podkarpackie	3 107	4 839	4	32
Podlaskie	1 362	2 770	3	39
Pomorskie	2 280	3 906	4	22
Śląskie	5 824	7 230	1	14
Świętokrzyskie	1 729	3 089	5	26
Warmińsko-mazurskie	3 166	4 337	3	30
Wielkopolskie	2 901	5 353	5	20
Zachodniopomorskie	2 046	3 517	3	20

Source: Author's elaboration based on SIMIK MIiR data

<sup>a</sup>based on the number of contracts signed by all beneficiaries

<sup>b</sup>based on the number of contracts signed by all beneficiaries defined in SIMIK as voivodship self-government and Marshal Office

The value of EU co-financing absorbed by regional self-governments per inhabitant and its structure according to the operational programs varies considerably in different NUTS 2 (fig. 1, 2 and 3). The smallest share of the total EU funding came from IEOP, which was used by only 5 self-governments, who obtained from this source from 1,2% to 4,9% of their total EU funding. Also OPIaE was a source of EU funding for only six regions, however in quite varying degrees. Half of them acquired from this source only from 0,1% to 2,4%, while the remaining three from 17% to 24% of their total co-funding from Structural Funds 2007–2013 (tab. 4).

It is observed in most analysed voivodships that regardless of the total value of absorbed EU funding regional operational programs are its main source: 4 regions obtained from this source between 80% and 90% of their total UE structural funding, other 5 regions from 72% to 75%, and 4 from 51% to 67%. Only in three voivodships the self-governments obtained from this source less than 50% (i.e., 43%, 36% and 19%).

The share of EU funds obtained by regional self-governments from other POs is very diverse in all voivodships and shows no identifiable trends. HCOP was a source of between 3,3% and 5,7% total EU structural co-financing, while ROPs from 18,6% to 87,5%. DEPOP was the source of more than 50% of the EU co-financing absorbed by świętokrzyskie and lubelskie and from 22% to 44% by the other three regions. At the same time all regions supported by DEPOP have acquired the highest value of EU funding per inhabitant (fig. 2) and which are above the median among units for which obtained EU funding accounted for more than 100% of their total budget revenues in 2013 (fig. 3).

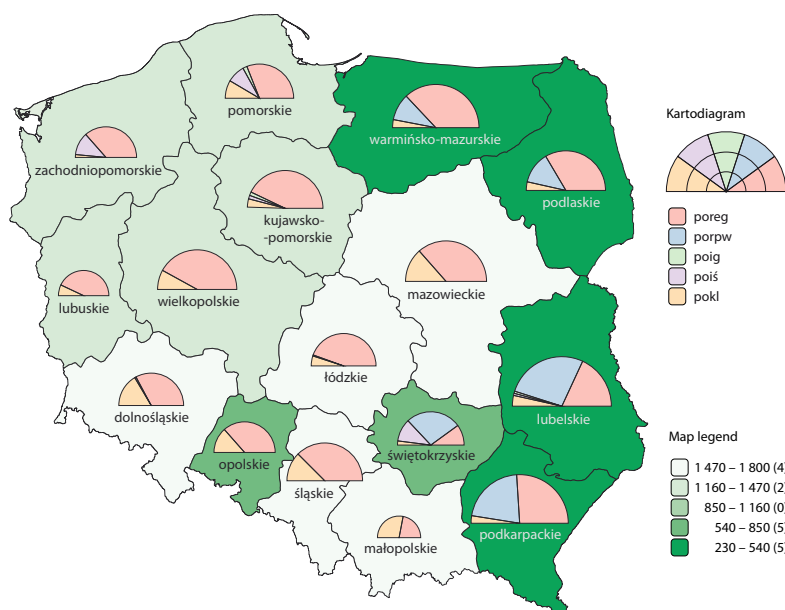
Four out of five regions of Eastern Poland (fig. 5) took the biggest share in total EU funding absorbed by self-governments under OPs 2007–2013, which can be connected with the fact that they could benefit from the multiregional programmes implemented only for these regions and giving them an extra source of funding.

Analysis of EU co-financed investments carried out by regional authorities indicates that most projects were related to transport infrastructure (51% of total EU funding obtained by self-

**Tab. 4.** Structure of EU funding obtained by regional authorities from each Operational Programme 2007–2013

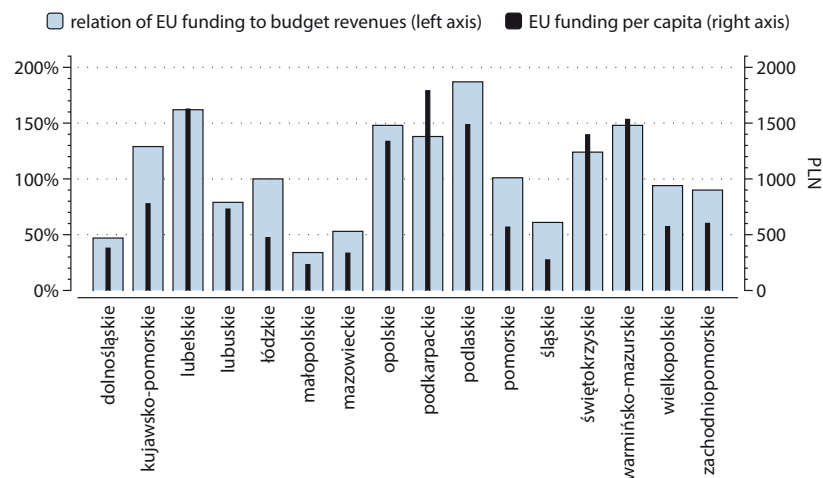
Self-government of	Share of funding from Operational Programme (in %)				
	HC	IaE	IE	ROP	DEP
Dolnośląskie	33,2	–	2,5	64,3	n/a
Kujawsko-pomorskie	8,8	2,4	2,8	86,0	n/a
Lubelskie	8,1	1,2	1,2	35,7	53,8
Lubuskie	14,1	–	–	85,9	n/a
Łódzkie	10,8	–	1,6	87,5	n/a
Małopolskie	57,1	–	–	42,9	n/a
Mazowieckie	26,4	0,1	–	73,5	n/a
Opolskie	28,4	–	–	71,6	n/a
Podkarpackie	4,7	–	–	51,4	43,8
Podlaskie	7,1	–	–	67,0	25,9
Pomorskie	17,7	17,0	4,9	60,3	n/a
Śląskie	25,2	–	–	74,8	n/a
Świętokrzyskie	5,8	20,2	–	18,6	55,4
Warmińsko-mazurskie	5,9	–	–	72,2	21,9
Wielkopolskie	15,2	–	–	84,8	n/a
Zachodniopomorskie	3,3	24,0	–	72,6	n/a

Source: Author's elaboration based on SIMIK MIiR data

**Fig. 1.** The average value of EU funding obtained by regional self-governments per inhabitant (in PLN) and the structure of EU funding by OPs

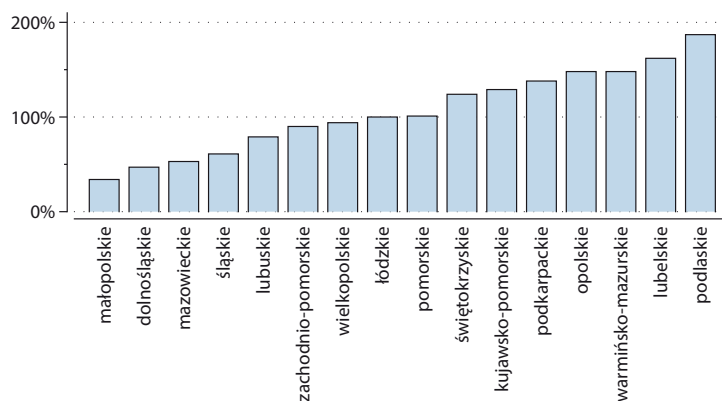
Source: Author's elaboration based on SIMIK MIiR and Central Statistical Office data

governments), then projects aimed at the development of information technology (18%), and projects connected directly with implementation of OPs (15%). Other categories of projects, connected with—e.g., labour market (5%), tourism and cultural services (4%), supporting enterprises and entrepreneurship (3%), social infrastructure and environmental protection (2.5 each), had a smaller share in obtained EU funding.



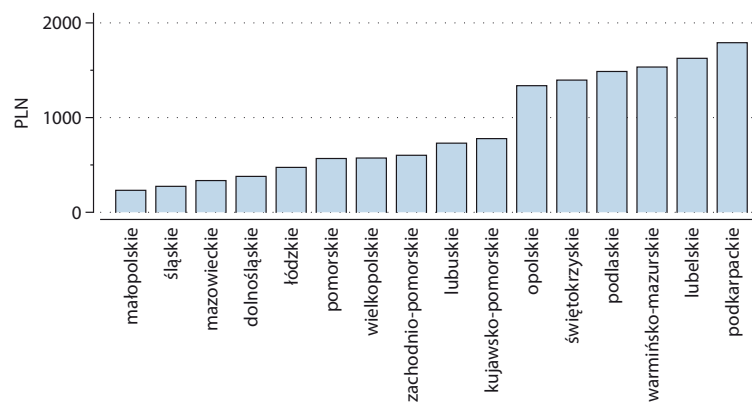
**Fig. 2.** EU funding obtained by regional authorities from OPs 2007–2013, per inhabitant and in relation to regional total budget revenues in 2013

Source: Author's elaboration based on SIMIK MIiR and Central Statistical Office data



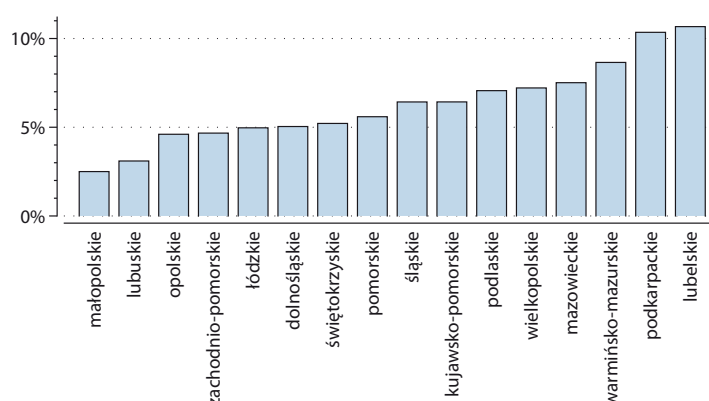
**Fig. 3.** Ranking of voivodships by EU funding obtained by regional authorities from OPs 2007–2013, as a share of regional total budget revenues in 2013

Source: author's elaboration based on SIMIK MIiR and Central Statistical Office data



**Fig. 4.** Ranking of voivodships by EU funding obtained by regional authorities from OPs 2007–2013, per inhabitant

Source: Author's elaboration based on SIMIK MIiR and Central Statistical Office data



**Fig. 5.** Fig. 5. Ranking of voivodships by their share in total EU funding obtained by all regional authorities from OPs 2007–2013

Source: Author's elaboration based on SIMIK MIiR and Central Statistical Office data

## Conclusions

Under all Operational Programmes 2007–2013 Polish regional self-governments signed 1576 contracts of total value PLN 20,5 billion, of which 74,3% (PLN 15,1 billion) came from EU structural funds. It made up respectively 1,5% of contracts signed by all kinds of beneficiaries, 4% of total value of all projects and for 5,3% of total EU co-financing absorbed in Poland in 2007–2013, as of December 31, 2014.

In the case of individual Operational Programmes 2007–2013 both the share and the value of EU funding obtained by regional self-governments varies significantly. Human Capital OP is the only programme, beside ROPs, which was used by self-governments of all regions, however, the funding obtained from this source made a differentiated share in their structural funding total ranging from the the lowest (3,3%) in zachodniopomorskie to the highest (57,1%) in małopolskie. Innovative Economy OP and Infrastructure and Environment OP were less popular with regional self-governments, as correspondingly only 6 and 5 of them used it as source of EU funding. However, just like in other cases, here also the value of obtained funding and its share in absorbed funding total differed considerably.

The only strong tendency relates to Regional Operational Programmes, which have been a source of more than 50% of EU funding for 13 voivodships. Two regions stand out in the group of analysed beneficiaries. These are Małopolskie and Lubelskie voivodships. The first is always ranked the last in all three rankings of regions (fig. 3, 4 and 5) due to its relatively lowest absorption of EU funding. The latter one differs as the first (fig. 5) or the second (fig. 3 and 4) in rankings, due to comparatively highest absorption of EU funding by its self-government. Investments carried out by regional self-governments and co-financed from EU structural funds fully reflect regional self-governments' duties defined by the Law on Voivodship Self-Government.

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