

Holistic space leadership beyond sectoral and professional borders – The case of Aviation Valley in the Polish Podkarpackie Region

Lech Suwala*

Technische Universität Berlin

Hardenbergstraße 40 a

10623 Berlin, Germany

+49-30-314-28088

l.suwala@isr.tu-berlin.de

Grzegorz Micek

Jagiellonian University, Kraków

Gronostajowa 7

30-387 Kraków

+48-12-664 53 31

grzegorz.micek@uj.edu.pl

Abstract:

By combining the two emerging discourses on place leadership (Gibney et al. 2009, Collinge & Gibney 2010, Beer & Clower 2014, Liddle et al. 2017, Sotarauta et al. 2017) and management geography (Abo 2004, Schlunze et al. 2012, Suwala & Oinas 2012, Jones 2018), the study develops a – what we call – holistic approach towards ‘space leadership’. ‘Space leadership’ tackles the nexus of decision making on the regional level and incorporates the concurrent management of different spatialities (economic locations, social places and cultural landscapes, based on different understandings of space) (Suwala & Oinas 2012, see for a similar approach while conceptualizing ‘place’ in leadership (Collinge & Gibney 2010, 381). Empirically, the study focuses on the past 15 years of the cross-sectoral “Aviation Valley initiative” within the Podkarpackie region in Southeast Poland, which aims to convert the region from a low-cost workbench towards innovative centre of aviation in the Visegrad countries, therefore counteracting polarization trends in Poland (Suwala & Micek 2018). Against this background, the paper contributes to the very few studies in leadership and development research in transition contexts (see Potluka et al. 2017). Methodologically, the study rests mostly on data from 45 in-depth interviews with stakeholders from intermediaries (for example, cluster managers) = 10, politicians (for example, mayors) = 9, academia (for example, professors) = 12 and Entrepreneurs (for example, CEOs of companies) = 14 around Poland among them the six top executives representing the board of directors of the initiative and biographical research on the respective regional leaders. The results demonstrate that space leadership encompass a high-profile, clearly accentuated long-term strategy in this Polish region. This strategy unfolds beyond sectoral and professional borders in a rather peripheral Polish mid-size town. The limited size of the city among other things seems to support an increasingly multivocal leadership with ‘one voice’ crossing boundaries between state (local & regional administration and authorities, universities) and non-state actors (companies and intermediaries). The study concludes that space

leadership in Podkarpackie is mostly driven by a handful of enthusiasts in key positions on the regional level that act as opinion leaders, early movers, scene setters and institutional entrepreneurs from very different professional backgrounds, but with 'one voice'; these leaders execute boundary spanning activities between academia, politics and the economy and (in)directly fulfill genuine spatial management functions as location managers in economic spaces (location), embedded gatekeepers in social spaces (place) and experienced preceptors in cognitive spaces (landscapes). The latter can be nicely shown taking this holistic view on space leadership. Although this leadership is based on a long-term vision extending national or European funding periods, and rests currently even on manifold pillars beyond the aviation industry, the question remains if the success is strongly dependent on specific personalities and is therefore transferable or not.