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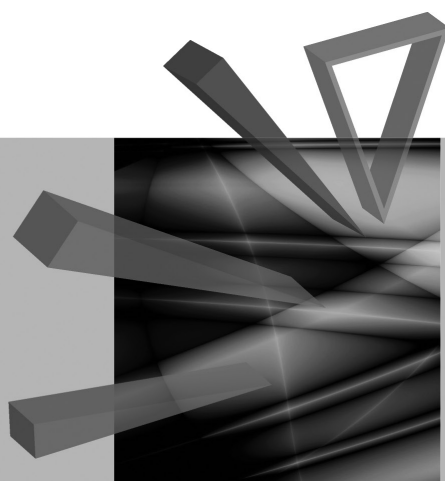
Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu

RESEARCH PAPERS

of Wrocław University of Economics

286

Regional Economy in Theory and Practice



edited by

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Publishing House of Wrocław University of Economics
Wrocław 2013

Copy-editing: Elżbieta Macauley, Tim Macauley, Marcin Orszulak

Layout: Barbara Łopusiewicz

Proof-reading: Barbara Łopusiewicz

Typesetting: Comp-rajt

Cover design: Beata Dębska

This publication is available at www.ibuk.pl, www.ebscohost.com,
and in The Central and Eastern European Online Library www.ceeol.com
as well as in the annotated bibliography of economic issues of BazEkon
http://kangur.uek.krakow.pl/bazy_ae/bazekon/nowy/index.php

Information on submitting and reviewing papers is available
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www.wydawnictwo.ue.wroc.pl

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Wrocław 2013

ISSN 1899-3192

ISBN 978-83-7695-345-8

The original version: printed

Printing: Printing House TOTEM

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**THE IMPACT OF TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS’
ACTIVITY ON REGIONAL HUMAN CAPITAL.
CASE STUDY OF THE ŁÓDŹ METROPOLITAN AREA**

Summary: Contemporary regional economies are very open, and one of the facets of this openness is hosting subsidiaries of transnational corporations (TNCs). Thus, studies on mutual relations between the regional human capital (HC) and the activity of TNCs appear to be an interesting issue. The above assumptions were a base for the empirical verification of the impact of TNCs’ activity on regional HC, and the significance of this capital as a location factor. The research was conducted among head representatives of TNCs operating in the Łódź metropolitan area with more than 50 employees. The paper presents the main aspects of the study, and leads to the conclusion that HC is an important, but not the key, location factor of TNCs in the region. Also, there is a relatively weak positive impact of TNCs’ activity on regional development.

Keywords: human capital, transnational corporations, regional development, Łódź metropolitan area.

1. The role of human capital in the processes of regional development

The significance of human capital in the economy has been a subject of growing interest at least since the 1950s, although the thesis about the important role of human beings and their skills in the creation of added value was already stated by Adam Smith or Johann von Thünen. However, the term “human capital” was popularized in economic literature in the second half of the 20th century by Jacob Mincer [1958], Theodor W. Schulz [1961] and Gary S. Becker [1962]. Contemporary research on the determinants of economic development show that international (or interregional) differences in the accumulation of material capital and labor explain only ca. 25–30 % of the differences in GDP level [Orłowski 2000; World Bank 1998]. Among other factors, one can indicate technical development and innovation. The latter, in turn, are fundamentally based on human skills, capabilities

and creativity which are treated as so called *human capital* (HC), in order to differentiate them from other forms of human (physical) effort (*labor power*).

The term "human capital" means a valuable and useful resource of knowledge accumulated in the process of education and professional practice [Oleksiuk 2009, p. 9]. Human capital is also defined more broadly, as a renewable and constantly magnified stock of knowledge, skills, abilities, qualifications, attitudes, motivation and health, having an economic value and being a source of future gains [Grodzicki 2003, p. 46]. Putting an emphasis on the economic value of human capital corresponds to the findings of Mincer [1974, p. 46], who confirmed a positive correlation between the extension of education and the growth of wages earned by employees. Walukiewicz [2010, p. 25] explains that human capital means "all, absolutely all, intangible resources (attributes) associated with a man treated as a separate human being".

Initially, most economic models were focusing on the issue of human capital, abstracted from the concept of "space" [Nowakowska, Przygodzki, Sokołowicz 2011, pp. 55–56]. However, with time the increasing impact of human capital on economic development became widespread in the literature on issues of local and regional development. In this context, a region is a complicated socio-economic system, where a high level of human capital development is one of the key conditions for its development. This is a consequence of the atmosphere of innovativeness, shared commonly by all actors in a given region [Sokołowicz 2008, p. 57]. The existence of a well-functioning education system, providing both formal knowledge and the system of inter-linkages between the actors, represented by various forms of collective learning (learning by interacting, learning by doing, etc.), ensures the sustainable capacity of the region to adapt to changing economic circumstances.

2. Human capital and spatial strategies of transnational corporations – interrelations

One can indicate many examples of economic research, proving the growing role of human capital in attracting foreign direct investment, as well as determining its nature [see e.g. Lucas 1990; Dunning 1988; Noorbakhsh, Paloni, Youssef 2001]. It should be noted however, that the relation between human capital and the spatial strategies of transnational corporations is of a *two-sided nature*. Human knowledge, skills, attitudes, or vital force, are not only the important location advantages of territories, but can be also enhanced by the activities of TNCs [more reviews in: Nowakowska, Przygodzki, Sokołowicz 2011, p. 175]. For example, when FDI contributes to technology transfer to regions, it is indirectly associated with the improvement of human capital [Donakowski 2003, pp. 314–315]. Also, in the context of the impact of TNCs on human capital via labor markets, both direct and indirect, as well as quantitative and qualitative consequences should be considered [more: UNCTAD 1994, p. 167; Zorska 2007, p. 289].

Human capital becomes an important location factor of transnational corporations (TNCs) not only due to labor force availability, but also because the socio-economic development is accompanied by increasing specialization and complexity of the economic structures. The latter leads to the growth of so called transaction costs [Coase 1937; Williamson 1975], in opposition to direct production costs [see: Pakulska, Poniatowska-Jaksch 2008, p. 36]. This implies a desire to seek a high level of human competences in order to minimize them.

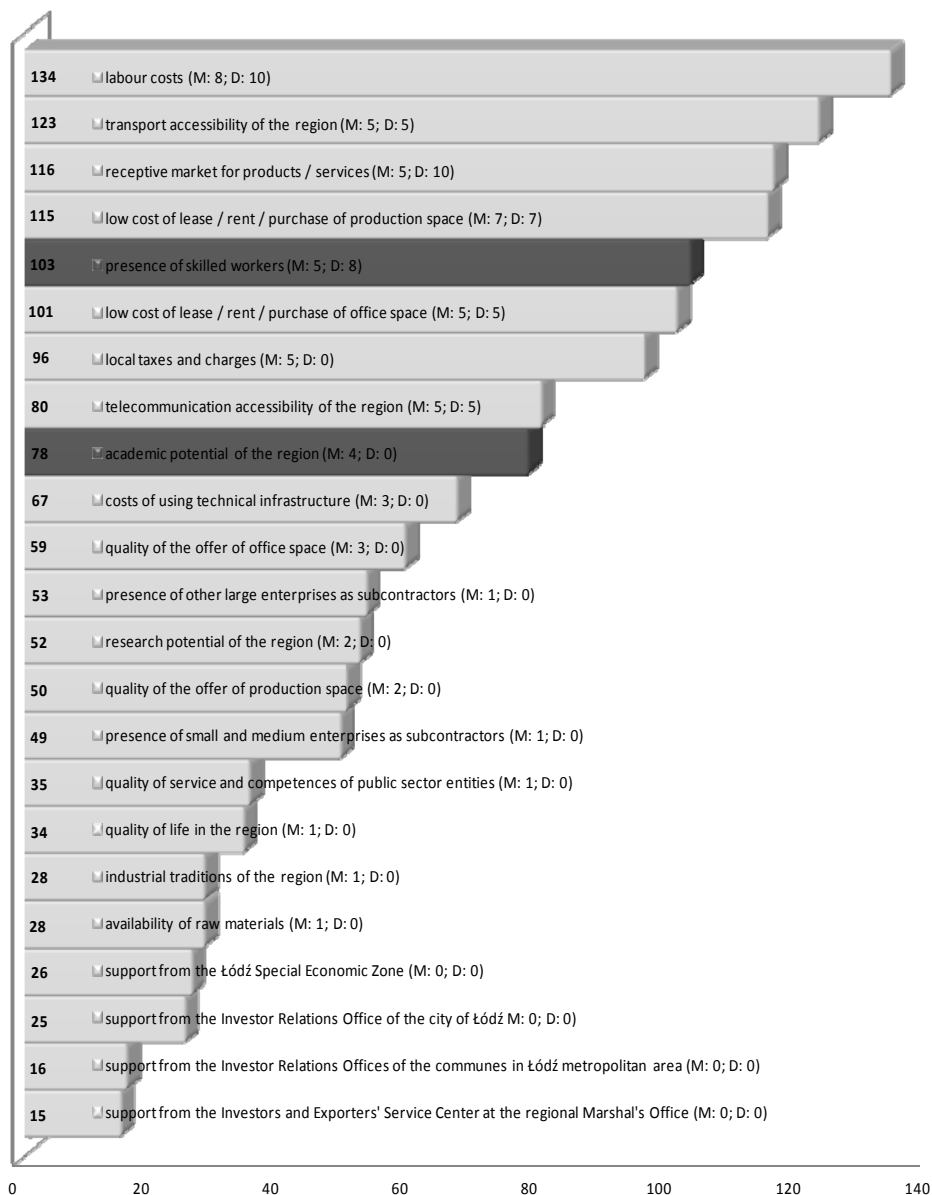
Finally, it is worth recalling the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), according to which, although in many cases corporations have a tendency to invest in the development of competencies and skills of local workers to a greater extent than incumbent companies, the host countries and regions should not rely only on TNCs in this area. Usually, corporations transmit to the host countries and regions technologies which are adapted to the “ambient” (typically lower) level of human capital and tend primarily to the efficient education of the operators of these technologies, which are rarely the newest. Thus, strengthening the level of skills and ensuring a high level of specialized training is still a task of the authorities of the host counties and regions, for these strategies may result in attracting foreign investment of a higher quality and encourage existing investors to take more sophisticated development strategies towards the host locations [UNCTAD 2000, p. 17].

3. Interrelations between the activities of transnational corporations and human capital development in the Łódź metropolitan area

The impact of the activity of transnational corporations on the competitiveness of regional economies is particularly interesting when examining this problem in metropolitan areas. Hosting a large number of TNC subsidiaries and branches is one of the important conditions for classifying a given area as having a metropolitan potential [see ESPON 2007; Sokołowicz 2010, pp. 109–110].

In this context, the Łódź metropolitan area became a subject of research aimed at the identification of the level of significance of various features of human capital against other location factors (human capital as a *location factor*). The second aim was concentrated on the verification of the extent to which TNCs’ activities contribute to the strengthening of this type of resource (*the influence of corporations on the level of human capital in the region*). The study was based on personal interviews among head representatives of companies with foreign capital operating in the Łódź metropolitan area, employing at least 50 employees.¹

¹ Research sample of 97 entities was drawn from a commercial database of stock and limited liability companies. After verification of these companies from the point of view of the adopted criteria and also the refusal of many of them of participation in the research, finally 12 representatives participated in face-to-face interviews. In consequence, the results of the study should be interpreted with some caution because of the limited representativeness.

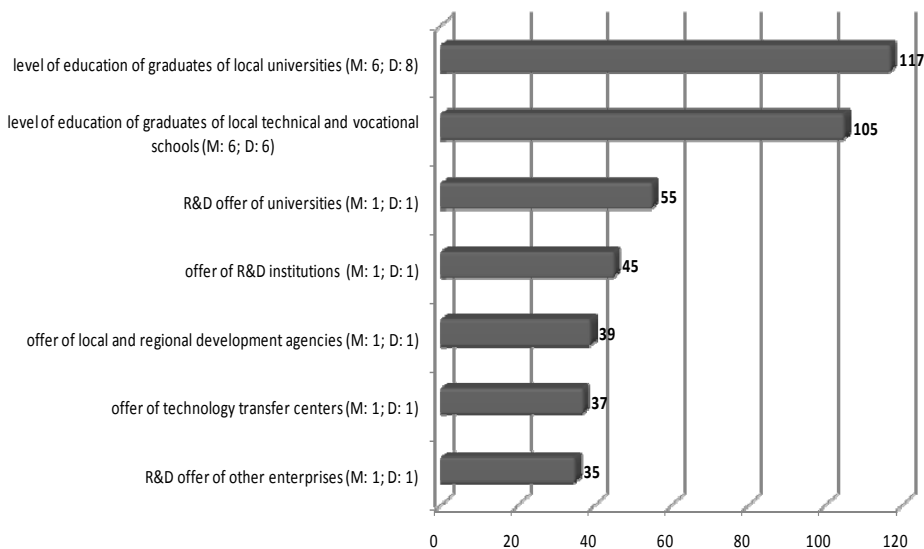


Letters in parentheses indicate the level of evaluation of a given location factor on a 1–10 scale of 1 to 10, where M – median, D – dominant. Numbers on the left present the sum of the assessments made by all respondents on a 1–10 scale. Factors referring directly to the issues of human capital are in dark grey color.

Figure 1. Business location factors of large international companies in the Łódź metropolitan area
Source: own elaboration.

The first of the areas of analysis was an identification of location factors, including those semantically connected with the term “human capital”. From the perspective of transnational corporations operating here, the latter is not a dominating but a relatively important feature of the Łódź metropolitan area. Although the presence of qualified staff was in fifth place on the list of advantages, it was relatively highly rated (median: 5, dominant: 8; see Figure 1).

One of the adverse aspects of the interrelations between TNCs activities and human capital in the region are the much less common, and much lower scores of respondents concerning academic potential and the research and development capacities of the region. In addition, also the rare indications of the presence of local subcontractors, the competences of the public sector representatives and support from pro-investment policy agencies, are alarming (Figure 1). In consequence, the level of the assessment of locally embedded human capital in its various forms (local competences of both own employees and employees of cooperating companies, universities or R&D institutions), when compared to more “primal” location factors (costs of labor and transport, access to markets), has been specified with a high degree of restraint.



Letters in parentheses indicate the level of evaluation of a given location factor on a 1–10 scale of 1 to 10, where M – median, D – dominant. Numbers on the left present the sum of the assessments made by all respondents on a 1–10 scale.

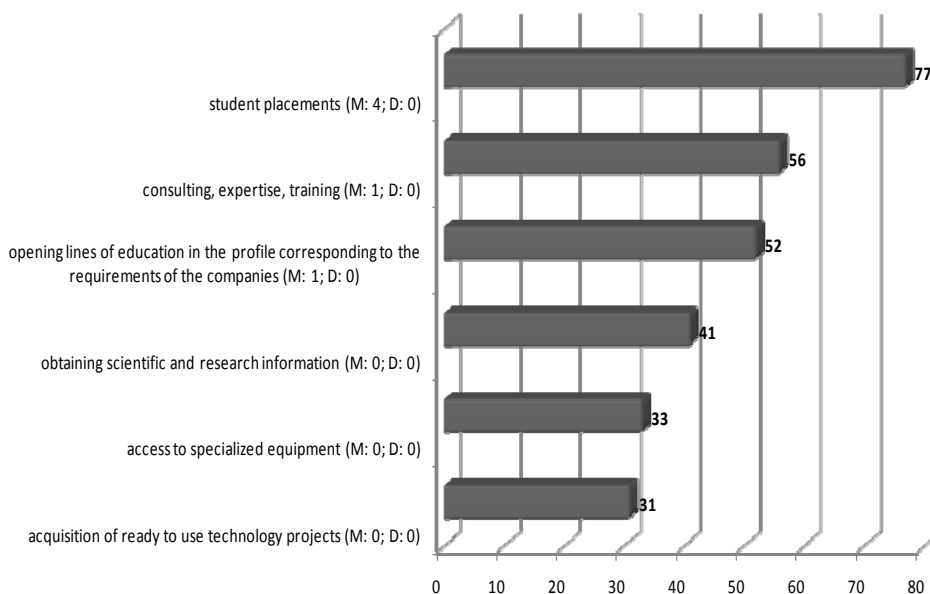
Figure 2. Assessment of the “knowledge offer” of the institutions of the Łódź metropolitan area from the perspective of transnational corporations

Source: own elaboration.

Another element of HC assessment referred to the effects of the activities of local and regional knowledge institutions. In this case, large enterprises with foreign capital ranked highly the level of education of graduates of the universities of Łódź. More than half of the respondents assessed it as not less than 6 on a 1–10 scale, while 8 was the prevalent rating. The level of education of alumni of local vocational and technical schools was only slightly lower.

On the other hand, the attractiveness of the other knowledge institutions was rated much lower. This allows us to admit that the surveyed companies do not perceive the competitive advantage of the region in both the offered knowledge and skills, and human resources of these entities. Similarly, the unfavorable evaluation referred to such bodies as regional development agencies and technology transfer centers.

When assessing the importance of cooperation with institutions of knowledge, a similar picture is painted as to the perception of what they offer. In other words, while the student placements or internships were declared commonly by surveyed enterprises as a popular form of cooperation, when looking at the more “advanced” and knowledge-transfer-oriented forms of cooperation, the picture is not optimistic (Figure 3).



Letters in parentheses indicate the level of evaluation of a given location factor on a 1–10 scale of 1 to 10, where M – median, D – dominant. Numbers on the left present the sum of the assessments made by all respondents on a 1–10 scale.

Figure 3. Areas of cooperation with the institutions of knowledge in the Łódź metropolitan area

Source: own elaboration.

Definitely the lowest evaluation appeared in such areas as acquiring the results of R&D made by institutions operating in the region, sharing of specialized equipment and the acquisition of ready-made technological solutions. In other words, subsidiaries of transnational corporations located in the Łódź metropolitan area, evaluate lower both the “technological offer” of the region and the level of its adaptation to their needs.

These findings lead to the identification of the barriers of cooperation of TNCs with regional and local knowledge institutions. Here, the lack of information about the R&D offered in the region and the possibility of technology transfer turned out to be the most common. On the other hand, such barriers as lack of confidence in the institutions of knowledge, their reluctance to cooperate or their small number are not dominant barriers in the eyes of the respondents.

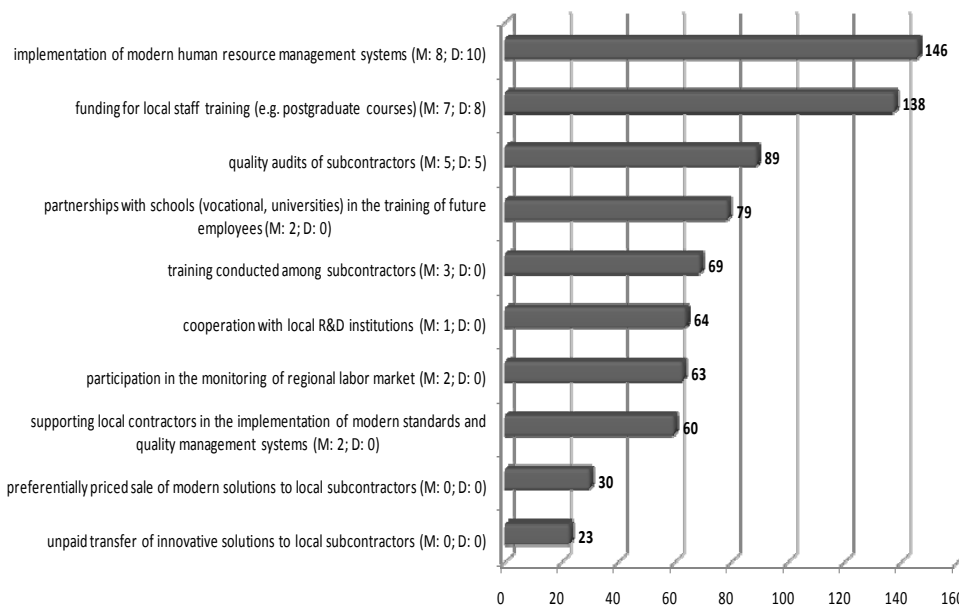
Table 1. Barriers to cooperation with knowledge institutions in the Łódź metropolitan area in the eyes of large multinational companies

Barriers	Sum of the assessments made by respondents on a scale of 1 to 10
No information about the knowledge institutions	82
Limited ability to adapt local solutions to business needs	82
Poor quality of the offer	76
Lack of confidence in the knowledge institutions	45
Too few / no knowledge institutions in the city/region	43
Reluctance of the knowledge institutions to cooperate	43

Source: own elaboration.

From the perspective of cities and regions as places of TNCs location, the latter should not only profit from, but also contribute to, the strengthening of the level and the quality of local human capital. In the case of the agglomeration of Łódź and the Łódź metropolitan area, both the directions and the level of this kind of commitment remain diversified. One can notice here that investment in human capital inside subsidiaries of transnational corporations visibly dominates over knowledge transfer via cooperation with their local environment (Figure 4).

The structure of the nationality of staff, divided into various levels of organizational structures of enterprises, was the last element of analysis aimed at the identification of TNCs’ involvement in the development of human capital. The basic conclusion is the observation that the proportion of workers from outside Poland increases with the level of the qualification requirements.



Letters in parentheses indicate the level of evaluation of a given location factor on a 1–10 scale of 1 to 10, where M – median, D – dominant. Numbers on the left present the sum of the assessments made by all respondents on a 1–10 scale.

Figure 4. The level of involvement of the subsidiaries of transnational corporations from the Łódź metropolitan area in the transfer of innovative solutions and the quality of human capital

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2. Structure of the origin of staff in the surveyed companies – the level of human capital internationalization

Staff	Local workers [%]	Foreign workers [%]
Top management	85.60	14.40
Administration	88.33	11.67
Engineers	77.14	22.86
Technicians	86.19	13.81
Production/low end services	99.99	0.010

Source: own elaboration.

While in the case of production and low end service workers, one can observe almost exclusively local staff, in the case of management and administration as well as technicians, the share of foreign staff grows to over 10%. The highest share of foreign workers was recorded in relation to engineering staff (22.9%). This structure, compared with the results of previous studies carried out by the author in 2005, lets us conclude that within 5 years, the share of foreign staff has noticeably

increased – in 2005 it exceeded 21%, although only for the group of top managers, but the other groups (lower-level managers, technical staff and production workers) did not exceed 3% [Sokołowicz 2008, pp. 107–109].

4. Conclusions

The relations between TNCs and regions are a double-sided, since foreign direct investment can both derive from and strengthen locally embedded human capital. Such a consideration became a subject of empirical verification on the territory of the Łódź metropolitan area, where the research results lead to two main conclusions:

1. In the territorial system being the subject of research, human capital is an important, but not the key, location factor of TNCs

2. Another side of these mutual relations – the potentially positive impact of TNCs' activity of regional development – does not occur in a clearly visible manner.

The subsidiaries of transnational enterprises located in the Łódź metropolitan area, mention among the most important location factors firstly low costs, and secondly a highly qualified labor force. Moreover, while the competences of graduates from local high schools and universities are rated highly, this is not necessarily the case of the potential of local R&D institutions and the skills of their employees. In consequence, the transfer of knowledge from the region to TNCs takes relatively simple forms (like the “capture” of resources by hiring employees directly in enterprises). More sophisticated ways of HR development (networking, inter-firm cooperation, building vertical and horizontal linkages, etc.) occur much more rarely.

On the other hand, a comparison of the structure of employment observed in the region in 2005 and more recently, led to an observation that the labor force in the region is becoming more and more internationalized. However, the observed situation is more derivative of the current stage of economic development, than simply the consequence of an erroneous strategy in the region to attract foreign direct investment.

What seems to be a basic challenge for regional FDI policy, is not an overall reorientation, but the greater attention to other than the traditional (labor costs, communication accessibility) factors of economic development (knowledge, human capital, regional social capital). What can be recommended here, is firstly, the wider promotion of the existing regional knowledge potential and subsequently, stimulating its further development.

It is worth emphasizing that the effectiveness of the proposed action is conditioned by the knowledge according to which the FDI attracting policy should be based not on a sectoral, but rather a territorial approach, referring to the capacity of the Łódź metropolitan area to exhibit territorially-rooted specific competitive advantages, which is hidden in, among other things, human capital. A territorial approach means also the need for the combining in one place the objectives and

actions conducted in such policy areas as: industrial policy, promotion policy, cluster supporting policy, or HC development policy and innovation policy with FDI supporting policy [see Nowakowska 2011, pp. 176–178]. This kind of approach still seems to be underappreciated by the regional and local authorities.

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WPLYW KORPORACJI TRANSNARODOWYCH NA ROZWÓJ KAPITAŁU LUDZKIEGO W REGIONIE. PRZYKŁAD ŁÓDZKIEGO OBSZARU METROPOLITALNEGO

Streszczenie: Współczesne gospodarki regionalne pozostają otwarte na otoczenie, a jednym z wymiarów tego otwarcia jest goszczenie filii korporacji transnarodowych (KTN). Z tego względu interesującym zagadnieniem jest badanie relacji między kapitałem ludzkim (KL) w regionie a działalnością KTN. Dlatego autor artykułu dokonał empirycznej weryfikacji wpływu KTN na KL w regionie oraz identyfikacji znaczenia tego kapitału jako czynnika lokalizacji. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone wśród filii KTN działających na terenie łódzkiego obszaru metropolitalnego i zatrudniających min. 50 pracowników. Artykuł prezentuje główne elementy badania prowadzące do wniosku, że w badanym regionie KL pozostaje ważnym, ale nie najważniejszym, czynnikiem lokalizacji filii KTN. Ponadto zaobserwowano relatywnie słaby pozytywny wpływ KTN na rozwój kapitału ludzkiego w regionie.

Słowa kluczowe: kapitał ludzki, korporacje transnarodowe, rozwój regionalny, łódzki obszar metropolitalny.