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Summary of the doctoral dissertation "Polish regions within the multi-level governance structures".

The challenges faced by modern societies, related to the so-called fourth industrial revolution, global warming, increasing social and spatial polarisation, access to housing resources or energy supply, require the implementation of multi-level policies, carried out with the involvement of institutions at various levels and entities from different sectors (i.e. science, business and non-governmental organisations). The argument above results from the findings of strategic documents such as "The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030" of the United Nations, "Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2030", or the Polish "National Strategy for Regional Development 2030".

The origin of the concept of multi-level governance dates back to the beginning of the 1990s. The term was then used to describe the evolution of assumptions and the model for the implementation of EU structural funds. On institutional and procedural grounds, these transformations concerned, e.g., increasing the role of regional authorities in the creation and implementation of planned measures. During the course of the thesis frequent reference was made to one of the contemporary definitions of "multi-level governance", according to which it is understood as "a process or a fragment of decision-making in which public authorities engage in relations with each other and actors from the private sphere, these actors operate at different territorial scales, and the process itself aims at producing public goods jointly, i.e. with the influence of all actors involved".

Another of the theoretical pillars of this thesis are the assumptions of the so-called 'new' new regional geography, according to which, the region is understood as the confluence of different interests and dimensions of socio-spatial relations. One of the most important questions posed by human geographers today is: how to combine spatial, economic, political and environmental interpretations of the region; which dimensions of socio-spatial relations have a decisive influence on regional settings in a given place and time; which consequences for regions and their inhabitants are brought about by the neoliberal model of economy and organization of social relations.

The main objectives of the dissertation were to determine to what extent the model of regional government in Poland fits the definitions of the concept of multi-level governance, as well as to determine what consequences arise from this model of regional government for socio-spatial relations in the studied regions. Referring to the first of the objectives,

one should conclude that in the analysed cases (i.e. in Lubelskie, Pomorskie and Śląskie regions), one can talk about the multi-level government model with elements of multi-level governance rather than a full implementation of the guidelines of the multi-level governance concept. This is because, while regional governments engage or are engaged in numerous relations with entities from the public sector and beyond, there are very few processes in which partners from the universities, business and the non-governmental sector perceive their influence on the directions of decisions made at the regional level. Similarly, when it comes to the relations between central and regional governments, we should bear in mind that this has been a sphere managed by specialists representing the interests of particular public institutions, without the systemic inclusion of representatives of other sectors in these relations.

Moving on to the second objective, it should be recognised that the broadly understood governance system is generally characterised by an inability to constructively respond to and dialogue on the main socio-economic challenges in regional contexts. This is evidenced by the lack of recognition of the subjective role of regional government in the discussion on the directions of the transformation in the Lubelskie and Silesia regions, as well as the lack of identification of the long-term goal of the regional community in the Pomorskie region (by the surveyed actors).

Before starting the empirical research, two research hypotheses were also formulated. The first assumes that the actions of regional governments implement the concept of multi-level governance to a different extent and in a different way. The second hypothesis assumes that the activities of regional governments related to the creation and functioning of metropolitan structures correspond to the assumptions of the multilevel governance concept. The first hypothesis was confirmed by the author. One should speak of regional models rather than a single national model of multilevel governance structures and processes. Respondents in the regions studied drew attention to various aspects of regional government's policies and attributed different meanings to the decisions made at this level, as was the case in the context of relations between central government and regional governments. At the same time, however, it should be borne in mind that multi-level governance is a theoretical construct, the assumptions of which and the resulting practical consequences do not, as a rule, directly constitute points of reference in the everyday activities of the respondents. The second hypothesis, however, was not confirmed. It should be noted that the actions of regional governments related to the creation and functioning of metropolitan structures are not of a governance nature, as they are both the cause and the result of arrangements made between representatives of public institutions at different levels.

The dissertation has been divided into five chapters, followed by conclusions with reference to the thesis objectives and research hypotheses indicated above. The first and second chapters are theoretical in nature, while chapters three to five discuss the results of empirical research conducted by the author. The first chapter presents how the approach to conducting regional studies has been shaped. Chapter two identifies the theoretical framework of the concept of multi-level governance. The third chapter discusses historical conditions for conducting policy towards regions by central authorities in Poland, and presents data on selected socio-economic processes that have taken place in Polish and European regions after 1999. In the fourth chapter, the systemic conditions for the implementation of public tasks at the regional level are described, the regions selected for the field research are characterised, and the elements of the construction of regional multi-level governance systems are identified and put in a wider context. In the fifth chapter, some of the previously applied research procedures were repeated in order to grasp the specificity of multilevel governance structures and processes on a metropolitan scale within the studied regions.

In the course of work on the thesis, the following research methods were used: in-depth literature review, text analysis (legal acts, strategic and programme documents), desk research, individual and group in-depth interviews (a total of 98 interviews were conducted), and elements of statistical analysis. During the field research, the case study methodology was used as a tool for operationalisation of theoretical assumptions and their empirical verification.