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Regionalisierung in Polen: Hintergrund, Merkmale und öffentliche Wahrnehmung. Eine erste Evaluierung

Elżbieta Opiłowska

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Regionalisation in Poland: background, features and public perception. A first appraisal

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Wahrnehmung. Eine erste Evaluierung*

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Introduction

- 1 The idea of “Europe of the regions” has been widely discussed in academic literature since the late 1980s. The debate was triggered by the development of the EU regional policy and the strengthening of regional governments in several member States. The EU regional policy and its financial instruments enabled the regional actors to better represent their interests on a supranational level. Furthermore, the involvement of sub-national actors on the European level was expected to establish a closer relationship between the EU and its citizens (Crepaz, 2016). According to the European Commission White Paper on European Governance of 2001¹, local and regional authorities should function as channels for interaction with citizens. This was confirmed in the Treaty of Lisbon, where for the first time, the principle of subsidiarity was considered below the state level and regional and local authorities were mentioned as cooperation partners (Grazi, 2013, p. 93).
- 2 Currently, the debate on regionalisation and regionalism receives a substantial boost once again. Through the revival of nationalism in many European countries the position of regional tiers has been weakened, which will be exemplified in the section on regionalisation in Poland. Furthermore, the financial crisis, the increase in terrorism and the refugee crisis have challenged European solidarity and provided arguments for nationalistic groupings that promised the restoration of security.

- 3 In the Central East European Countries (CEECs) that underwent a strong centralisation process during the communist regime, the regionalisation could start only after the fall of the Iron Curtain and was closely connected with the European integration process.
- 4 This article traces the implementation of the regionalisation reforms in Poland and discusses their substantial achievements and challenges. It also analyses how far the strengthening of regional tiers has impacted the regional identity of Polish citizens and their identification as Europeans. It addresses the following questions: What competences have the regional authorities gained within the administrative reforms in Poland? What are the main achievements and challenges of the regionalisation process in Poland? How do Polish citizens evaluate the self-government reforms and functionality of local/regional governments? How do they evaluate the regional policy and Poland's integration with the European Union? Do they identify with the region they live in, the state or Europe?
- 5 However, in the light of the availability of only fragmented public opinion polls on local/regional issues, the systematic analysis of citizens' assessment of regionalisation as well as of their attitudes towards local authorities and local community will not be possible. Instead, I intend to outline the general perception of issues related to regionalisation process in Poland.
- 6 The first section of this article focuses on the theoretical background and data. It is followed by the subchapter on the historical perspective of the regionalisation process in Poland that aims to identify the main obstacles to the creation of regional identities. Subsequently, the regionalisation of administrative structures as well as its appraisal by the citizens are analysed. Finally, some concluding remarks are formulated.

Theoretical framework and data

- 7 Regionalism is “a multidimensional and pluralistic phenomenon involving many different actors, appearing in different guises” (Söderbaum, 2005, p. 87). Generally, regionalism and regions are analysed on two scales – the macro- and micro-scales respectively². Whereas macro-regions are supra-national regions that function between the global and the state level, micro-regions are sub-state or sub-national regions that operate between national and regional/local levels (Lombarde, 2010; Söderbaum, 2005).
- 8 This article deals with micro-regions and micro-regionalism with references also to macro-regionalism in the form of the European Union that has impacted the regionalisation of Poland.
- 9 In the research on regionalism two main types are regarded – an “old” regionalism and the so called “new regionalism”. The former refers to initiatives and organisations that were founded in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, followed by new regionalism in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Frederic Söderbaum (2016) distinguishes between four phases of regionalism. Early regionalism can be traced far back in history and includes the early visions of European cooperation and unity as well as formation of regions in colonial territories. Old regionalism is a post-WWII phenomenon. Macro-regional cooperation was regarded as a way of avoiding war and a motivation behind the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community.
- 10 Since the mid-1980s the wave of new regionalism can be traced. It was characterized as multidimensional and pluralistic and was shaped by various institutions and non-state,

civil society actors (Söderbaum, 2016, p. 72). Furthermore, many theorists of new regionalism have regarded regions as not being preordained, but rather as objects constructed and constituted by various actors (Hettne, 2003). The contemporary phase of regionalism has been called comparative regionalism that “is shaped by a global order and characterised by many diverse and also contradictory trends and processes” and as a result it became a multidimensional and multilayered phenomenon (Söderbaum, 2016).

- 11 The rise of regionalism was manifested through various book publications (i.e. Lindberg and Scheingold, 1971; Katzenstein, 2005; Söderbaum and Shaw, 2003; Börzel and Risse, 2016). However, as Fawcett (2015) argues “work on regionalism rarely adopts a sustained historical perspective except in an introductory and incomplete way”.
- 12 Despite numerous publications on regionalism and regions, there is no coherent definition of a region that will capture its complexity. Michael Keating emphasises that “region is an elusive concept, covering a variety of territorial levels and a range of social contents. A minimal definition would present it as an intermediate territorial level, between the state and the locality” (Keating 1998, pp. 9-10).
- 13 In a later book (Keating 2004, p. xi), he adds:

“A region may have a historic resonance or provide a focus for the identity of its inhabitants. It may represent a landscape, architecture or a style of cooking. There is often a cultural element, perhaps represented by a distinct language or dialect. Beyond this, a region may sustain a distinct civil society, a range of social institutions. It can be an economic unit [...]. It may be, an increasingly is, a unit of government and administration. Finally, all these meanings may or may not coincide, to a greater or lesser degree.”
- 14 Regarding disciplinary preferences, as Schmitt-Egner argues (2002) political science uses the concept of *region as an action unit*, whereas regional studies and geography focus on the *region as an action space*. In consequence, there is a two-dimension typology of the region. In a horizontal perspective the region as a structural, administrative region or as an identity region that provides an arena for interregional exchange and interaction. The vertical type of action refers to the region as an international or trans-national action unit (e.g. EU, ASEAN).
- 15 Furthermore, micro-regions can be defined along physical-geographic regions, cultural regions, economic regions, administrative/planning regions and political regions (Söderbaum, 2005, pp. 93-95). As with regions, regionalism also has various explanations that range from “an almost non-existent sense of regional identity to fully-fledged sub-state nationalism” (Anderson, 2000). Taking the sources of regionalism into consideration, two forms of regional struggles may be grasped – an ethnically motivated regionalism that refers to ethnic/national and religious differences of a collective whole; and an economic regionalism propagated by strong regions that disconsider the wealth redistribution of a central state, or represented by weak regions that accuse the state or strong regions of colonising them (Gorzela, 1993, pp. 48-49).
- 16 According to Björn Hettne (1999) we can distinguish five degrees of region-ness: region as a geographical location; as a social system of trans-local relations among human groups; as a cooperational unit in political, economic, cultural and military fields; as unit with distinct civil society and finally as unit of distinct identity, institutional capability and legitimacy. Moreover, regionalism may be strengthened by the

formation of common economic strategies, new forms of cultural identification and the mediation of co-present social interactions (Raco, 2006; Opiłowska, 2016).

- 17 Besides, Grzegorz Gorzelak (1993) points out the distinction between regionalism and regionalisation. Whereas the former refers to the aspiration of a territorially collective character of development of its own regional identity, the latter indicates the administrative structures of a state and a strengthening of regional authorities by assigning them with competences. Regionalisation is closely connected with the decentralisation process, which is a complex phenomenon and includes three dimensions: political, administrative and financial decentralisation. Political decentralisation is based on the introduction of local governments that are managed by democratically chosen representatives and are independent from state. In the case of administrative decentralisation, local governments are provided with appropriate competences, specific tasks and instruments to accomplish these tasks. Finally, financial decentralisation means that local governments obtained financial resources at their disposal as well as the right to manage them (Otola, 2008).
- 18 The rise of micro-regionalism has been explained by different arguments. Michael Keating indicates (Keating, 2017) two theoretical perspectives: a) functional arguments putting forward economic globalisation and efficiency as a reason for changing the spatial scale of governance; b) the constructivist approach which considers “regions as the outcome of contestation among social and political actors in specific conditions” (ibidem, p. 10.). The author proposes six conceptual frames for constructing a region, which are not separate entities, but rather intersecting guises:
 - integrative regionalism (territorial integration is highlighted);
 - competitive regionalism (regions as economic units competing on the market);
 - regions as government (regions as self-regulating economic systems, as political autonomies and as representatives of citizens);
 - regions and the refraction of interests (the question of competencies of local/regional authorities and territorialisation of sectoral and class interests are in the center of attention);
 - welfare regionalism (the issues of inter-regional equity and territorial justice are addressed);
 - identity regionalism (regions as spaces of social identity construction).
- 19 For the purposes of this article, regions are conceptualised as government, sub-state administrative units as well as identification spaces of their inhabitants. However, the focus is placed on the question of how the regionalisation process in Poland has been perceived by Polish citizens.
- 20 Based on the analysis of the selected secondary sources as strategic documents, regional development strategies and evaluation reports on the implementation of structural funds, in the first step regionalisation will be examined as a decentralisation process and the empowerment of regional authorities. Subsequently, the available surveys on Polish citizens’ identifications and their appraisal of administrative reforms in Poland as well as the EU cohesion policy, will provide sources for the exploration of regions as spaces of social identification and regional consciousness. I will primarily evaluate data from the Polish Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) that regularly conducts surveys on a sample representative for the adult Polish population (with N=1000). Furthermore, the analysis of the Institute of Public Affairs on the opinions of young people on Europe as well as Eurobarometer polls will be included. It can be

argued that the regionalisation process can be considered successful, if it is internalised by the society.

- 21 Against the backdrop of incomplete sources, the approach of “theory-based evaluation” (Leeuw, 2012; Bachtler *et al.*, 2017) is used. This methodology, as outlined by Bachtler *et al.*, does not try to establish a direct causal link between the policy and changes at the regional level, but it focuses “on understanding what it was that policymakers sought to change, and how what was done was expected to influence regional development” (Bachtler *et al.*, 2017, p. 12). My article applies the method of hermeneutic text analysis to trace the process of regionalisation and its public perception and to reconstruct and test assumptions. It analyses the declared mechanisms of implementing regional policy in Poland and its possible impact on citizen’s identifications. Thus, the aim is to provide a synthesised analysis of the regionalisation process in Poland and its main obstacles. Moreover, taking the constructivist perspective in which regions are multidimensional entities shaped by different actors, the article focuses on the questions as to how the creation of regional units is anchored in public opinion and if the regions “provide a focus for the identity of its inhabitants” (Keating, 2004).

Historical background

- 22 The history of Poland as a centralist state without a distinct regional tradition has a strong impact on its contemporary regionalism and regional identity. This section aims to present an overview on the key historical events that influenced the Polish path to regionalisation.
- 23 Since the 18th century Poland was divided between three imperial powers – the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and Habsburg Austria, and lost its sovereignty for over one hundred years. The policy of the annexationists (Russification and Germanisation, and relative autonomy in Galicia) has impacted the regional identity for centuries and makes itself visible in some regional peculiarities up to the present day. The perpetual struggles for the regaining of independence manifested in national insurrections and the romantic myth of Poland as being *the Christ of nations* and the slogan *for your freedom and ours* shaped Polish literature as well as the national collective memory and consciousness for centuries. In fights for freedom and the restoration of national statehood there was no place for regional loyalties and interests (Davies, 1982).
- 24 In 1918 Poland finally did recover its statehood. However, in interwar period Poland was a multiethnic state with minorities (i.e. Ukrainians, Belarusian, Germans, Jews, Russians and Roma) making up about 30% of the population. Indeed, the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity was a hot spot for many conflicts. After the outbreak of WWII Poland was again divided and occupied by the Third Reich and the Soviet Union in what was called the “fourth partition”.
- 25 After the WWII borders of Poland were shifted to the west, so that eastern territories (the so called *Kresy*) were annexed by Soviet Union and as a compensation Poland gained former German territories in its northern and western parts. This shift of borders resulted in a massive population transfer. The Germans had to leave the western territories, and were replaced by Polish settlers from *Kresy*, central and south Poland. As a result of the exchange of population many territories became a real melting pot of different kinds of settlers. Even among Polish citizens of differing origins (e.g. settlers from central Poland and those from eastern territories) conflicts occurred

very often. Despite the ethnic and cultural differences among Polish citizens, the new government imposed the nationalistic version of communism. There was no place for minority rights or regional identifications. The German past of the annexed territories, which were called in the official propaganda “recovered territories” as well as the lost homeland of *Kresy*, became a taboo subject in the public sphere. The centralisation of the state and the homogenization of society were the main objectives of the communist regime. Thereby, references to national myths, symbols and collective memory were regarded by the Polish authorities as a way to consolidate the society and in result to get support for the new government (Opilowska, 2009). As Benedict Anderson (1991, p. 3) points out:

“And many ‘old nations’, once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by ‘sub’-nationalism within their borders – nationalism which, naturally, dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day. The reality is quite plain: the ‘end of the era of nationalism,’ so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.”

- 26 Poland after WWII was anything but consolidated. Moreover, since the 18th century Polish nationhood was permanently under threat. During the war, the national affiliation was the major deciding factor on life or death. A person was killed, because he/she was Polish, a Jew or Ukrainian (Kersten, 1993). This experience has impacted the way of thinking for subsequent generations. In view of the threat group membership became the highest value. Furthermore, the communist party maintained the perceived threat of German invasion until the 1970s (Opilowska, 2009). Therefore, Polishness and not regionalism was in the foreground. On the 1 June 1975 the middle-tier of self-government (*powiaty*) was abolished and the number of voivodships was increased from 17 to 49. During the communist period the function of regional public administration was reduced to the “execution of top-down directives of the centralist state, whose regulatory policy dominated all spheres of public life” (Czernielewska, Paraskevopoulos & Szlachta, 2004, p. 462).
- 27 Besides, the historical legacy of being under foreign rule for over one century has effected much of today's regional disparities. For example, the area of Poland that belonged to the Russian partition is the most underdeveloped and the weakest one in Poland (*ibid.*). Poland's east seems to also be more conservative. That is reflected in the results of elections, both parliamentary in 2015 and local elections in 2018 as the ruling Law and Justice Party won in all eastern and southern voivodships (including Lower Silesia)³.
- 28 Hence the post-war nationalist policy of the communist authorities and the lack of regional traditions have a significant influence on current Polish regionalism and regional identifications, which I am going to analyse in the following sections.

Regionalisation of the administrative structures

- 29 At the outset of the transformation process in 1989, Poland was a highly centralised state. In contrast, the European Union underlined the importance of multi-level governance, and the role of sub-national authorities, by implementing the cohesion policy and its structural funds. The accession to the EU was the main goal of Poland's foreign policy. However, its desire for EU-membership placed Poland and other CEECs in a relationship of “asymmetrical interdependence” with EU actors, so that they could

demand some reforms and influence the politics, political and policies of candidate states (Scherpereel, 2010, p. 45). Indeed, the power asymmetries between the EU and Poland might have suggested that the EU drove the regionalisation process. According to the Europeanisation thesis, EU has provided both negative and positive incentives for regionalisation in CEE. Candidate countries on the one hand were obliged to implement the *acquis communautaire* prior to accession, on the other hand they could gain pre-accession financial assistance as from the PHARE or SAPARD Programme (O'Dwyer, 2006).

- 30 Nevertheless, the opportunity to put pressure should not be considered the same as an impact. As many researchers (i.a. O'Dwyer, 2006; Scherpereel, 2010) argue, the EU's role in regionalisation in CEECs was secondary to the primary domestic dynamics. The decentralisation process offered political parties the possibility to tailor the regional administrative structures to their own aims and to build party structures in regions: "the EU figured as a useful pretext for reforms that allowed domestic political forces, in particular governing party coalitions, to shape regional institutions in their own interests" (O'Dwyer, 2006, p. 222). In Poland the decentralisation was guaranteed in the Constitution of 1997 (Art. 15)⁴: "The territorial system of the Republic of Poland shall ensure the decentralisation of public power".
- 31 The self-government reforms were implemented in two stages. Shortly after the fall of communism, in March 1990 the Polish *Sejm* passed the Law on Communes. It introduced democratic elections at the local level. Communes (*gminy*) became legal personalities. Furthermore, the reforms led to a substantial expansion of the duties and responsibilities of local authorities. The ownership of communal property was transferred from central to local government that also administer local budgets. In addition, municipalities became responsible for all local affairs (e.g. spatial planning, public transport, healthcare, education – kindergarten, elementary education, and culture – municipal libraries, local cultural institutes).
- 32 Within the act on the three-tier division of the country of 24 July 1998, the second stage of reforms began. Three-tier territorial organisation was introduced: commune (*gmina*), county (*powiat*) and voivodship/region (*województwo*). Moreover, it reduced the number of voivodeships from 49 to 16 that are equivalent to NUTS 2 units.

Figure 1. Polish voivodeships.

Source: Central Statistical Office of Poland, www.stat.gov.pl (accessed 25 November 2017)

- 33 Hence, voivodeships possess legal personalities and are given an executive power to fulfil all public tasks that are not assigned to other public authorities. They administer the voivodeship's property and its regional budget. However, at the regional level there is a dual administrative structure. The central government is represented at the regional level by a voivode (governor of a voivodeship) who is appointed by the Prime Minister. The voivode is responsible for public security services (police, fire service, social care, inspection of environment protection, trade inspection). Besides, the self-government of voivodeships – voivodeship councils (*sejmiki*) are elected in general elections and headed by marshals. Marshal boards are responsible for the general management of the voivodeship and represent the voivodeship abroad; they coordinate the regional foreign policy and the regional development strategy. They draft the Regional Development Strategy and the Regional Spatial Development Plan. Furthermore, they also manage the 16 Regional Operation Programmes (ROPs) that are co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (in 2014-2020 also by the Social Fund) within the Cohesion Policy of the EU. The ROPs are basic instruments of regional development managed by regional authorities.
- 34 In order to coordinate the development policy more efficiently and to strengthen the multilevel-governance, a new instrument in the form of a “contract” between the regional authorities and the central government was introduced in 2000. It “defines the objectives and the most important investment for both parties, their financing and implementation; concentration of the investment”⁵.

- 35 At the central level the Ministry of Investment and Economic Development (until 2018 the Ministry of Development) is responsible for the cooperation with regional authorities by implementing the development strategies and managing the EU funds.
- 36 In 2010 the then Ministry of Development drafted the National Strategy of Regional Development (NSRD) 2010-2020⁶ that defines three main goals: competition, cohesion and efficiency. The new rationale of the regional policy is based on the following premises:
- long-term, decentralised development policy that supports all regions, instead of short-term, top-down distributed grants;
 - use of the endogenous potential tailored to local/regional needs instead of exogenous investments and transfers;
 - focus on potentials (and not barriers) of development and good governance with stronger involvement of regional and local authorities.
- 37 However, the Strategy for Responsible Development (SRD), which was adopted by the cabinet council in 2017⁷, enforced changes of the foregoing strategy. So, the Ministry of Investment and Development prepared in 2018 the new NSRD 2030, which is consistent with the aims of the SRD and focuses on socially sensitive and territorially balanced development. It puts emphasis on: sustainable development of the whole country, retreat from the existing regional policy, which supported mainly the largest cities, equal access to development opportunities and development of social capital regarded as a key factor determining regional development.⁸ Currently the NSRD 2030 is in the consultation phase.
- 38 In sum, all strategies emphasise the role of regional and local authorities in the development of regional policy, which should meet territorial needs and use the endogenous development potentials. In this way, the regional policy is expected to follow the principles of place-based policy.
- 39 This regional development rationale, clearly related to EU regional policy rationale, opens the question to what extent do the EU funds contribute to the regional cohesion. The territorial distribution of EU funds depends on the degree of development of a region – the most developed voivodeships get fewer funds per capita than the less developed ones. In the 2007-2013 period the net EU funds assigned to Poland totalled 73 billion euros. Nevertheless, despite the bigger inflow of EU funds the weaker voivodeships did not manage, as Grzegorz Gorzelak claims (2017, p. 42), to achieve a higher rate of growth than the better developed regions. As a result, the disparities between regions have increased rather than decreased.
- 40 This is confirmed by other studies. According to the report of the Polish Ministry of Development (2016, p. 7)⁹, in 2007-2015 period the self-government units were, apart from enterprises, the biggest beneficiary of EU funds. The greater part of the pool was spent on transport, human capital and innovation, research and development and further entrepreneurship, environment protection and risk prevention. Nonetheless, these voivodeships that got the most funds did not register the best development rates; rather, it was those that were the most developed as Mazovian, Lower Silesia and Great Poland. However, in 2007-2013 richer localities have absorbed per capita more EU grants than poorer ones. Thus, it can be argued that EU funds have failed to reduce interregional development gaps (Medve-Bálintm, 2017). External assistance, as Grzegorz Gorzelak points out, can only have a pro-growth significance if endogenous

conditions allow it to be used. Funds directed to less developed regions play rather the social and not the development role (Gorzelak, 2017, pp. 35-36).

Figure 2. GDP per capita in Poland in 2015.

Source: Central Statistical Offices of Poland, Statistical Office in Katowice, (accessed 30 December 2016)

- 41 As we can see in the graph above, there is a big difference in GDP between eastern and western voivodeships. The difference between the richest Mazovian and the poorest Lubelskie amounts to 90.8%.
- 42 Taking into consideration the development of Polish regions after 1989 Gorzelak and Jałowicki (1998) have identified four trajectories (cited in Czernielewska, Paraskevopoulos & Szlachta, 2004, p. 464):
 - Positive continuity – a good position before 1989 and a positive transformation; mainly regions around large agglomerations;
 - Positive discontinuity – Western regions which profited from the liberal market economy and neighbourhood with Germany;
 - Negative discontinuity – old industrial regions;
 - Negative continuity – Eastern regions of Poland.
- 43 When faced with regional disparities, the Ministry of Development worked out the additional support for the eastern voivodeships (Lubelskie, Podkarpackie, Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie) – the Operational Programme Eastern Poland 2014-2020. The main objective of the programme is to increase the competitiveness and innovation of the Eastern Poland macroregion (NUTS 1).
- 44 According to the study by Jacek Zaucha and Krzysztof Komornicki (2017, p. 308) “the intraregional policies of Polish regions seem to fulfil the criterion of being territorially sensitive. In all of the Polish regions, policy goals and measures are territorially diversified”. Furthermore, the above mentioned NSRD 2030 emphasises the objective to counteract the development discrepancies between and within regions¹⁰.
- 45 Taking stock of the regionalisation process in Poland, we can argue that the outcomes are partly satisfying. On the one hand, by comparing three planning periods –

2004-2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 we can observe that regional authorities have gained more competencies: “in the first planning period regions were weak bargaining partners vis-à-vis the central government. They were weakened both by their excessive fiscal dependence on the central government and also by the centralising pressures coming from Brussels” (Bruszt, 2008, p. 622). Since 2007 regions participate in preparing of regional development strategies, especially by developing and implementing operational programmes. In addition, the access to UE funds provided self-governments with instruments to implement regional development. Over the years they received more influence on the investment of EU funds. Whereas in the financial period 2007-2013 the voivodeship governments administered almost 25% of all funds, in 2014-2020 they have nearly 40% of the pool at their disposal (60% of ERDF and ESF). The remaining funds are managed at the central ministries level (Sześciło, 2018).

- 46 On the other hand, the dual administrative structure, in particular in cases when voivodes and marshals represent the opposing political camps, (as we have the case in Poland since 2015) may handicap the efficient territorial management. The marshal office, which is at the regional level responsible for the development and implementation of regional policy, is obliged to consult the regional development strategy and ROPs with the voivode. Thus, a voivode plays a crucial role in signing the voivodship contracts that are essential instruments to transfer the funding for regional development from the state budget to regions (Czernielewska, Paraskevopoulos & Szlachta, 2004, p. 469). Generally, in Poland, “central government remains the significant source of funding for regional development (both domestic funding but also EU funds that are channeled through central government)” (Ferry, 2013).
- 47 Another challenge for the functioning of self-government results from their being delegated public tasks, such as running of public hospitals while leaving control and financial resources in the hands of central authorities: “where local governments have been charged with running the majority of public hospitals [...] they have been set up as a petitioner of the National Health Fund, who has control over finances” (Sześciło, 2018, p. 7).
- 48 However, since the change of the governing party in 2015 some competencies of self-governments have been reduced. These include (Sześciło, 2018):
 - withdrawal of the competence to decide on the network of schools in a voivodeship and delegation of the decision to the education superintendent who acts on behalf of the voivode;
 - introduction of the reform of the education system without taking into account the critical opinions of self-governments;
 - centralisation of the voivodeship environmental protection funds since 2017 (the government took over the competence to fill positions in voivodeship bodies of environmental protection which previously belonged to self-governments);
 - withdrawal from municipal councils the competence to approve water and sewage tariffs.
- 49 The above-mentioned legislative changes demonstrate the efforts of central government to limit the competencies of regional/local authorities. But how do the citizens evaluate the role of the regional/local tiers? The next section aims to analyse the public opinion on self-governments and to verify what reference points (European, regional, local or still national) prevail among Polish citizens.

Views of Polish citizens

- 50 The regionalisation process cannot succeed without support at the grassroots level. A region should provide a reference point for its inhabitants who internalise the promoted regional identity. Otherwise only a shallow regionalisation emerges as an outcome of a top-down pressure. The following chapter proposes an appraisal of the role and functionality of self-governments in Poland, and of the identification forms of Polish citizens to them. Available public opinion polls as listed below allow to assess the representations towards local authorities and regional policy, the collective identities dynamics and the attitude towards the European Union.
- 51 CBOS 21 (2001), Opinions on the functioning of self-government authorities.
 CBOS 165 (2009), Poles on their attachment to their place of residence and country.
 CBOS 52 (2014), 10 years of Poland's membership in the European Union.
 CBOS 31 (2016), Poland in the European Union.
 CBOS 151 (2016), Between patriotism and nationalism.
 CBOS 155 (2016), Social assessment of the use of European funds.
 CBOS 50 (2017), Which Union do Poles want?
 CBOS 46 (2018), Cooperation of local authorities with residents.
 CBOS 74 (2018), Commitment of Poles to local communities.
 CBOS 82 (2018), Assessment of local authorities and their competencies
 CBOS 100 (2018), About history, locally.
 CBOS 105 (2018), Patriotism of Poles.
 CBOS 120 (2018), Local government elections and a sense of civic empowerment.
 CBOS 166 (2018), Poland in the European Union.

Evaluation of local authorities

- 52 In autumn 2018 Polish citizens decided on the composition of local governments. During the election year a number of opinion polls on local authorities were carried out. The most significant results will be presented in this section.
- 53 In general, in 2018, Polish residents evaluate the mayors of their town or commune rather positively (Figure 3). This applies also to the work of city/commune councils: 64% of respondents think that they are doing a good job, whereas 16% view their work negatively. However, in 2001 the majority of respondents (45%) were unsatisfied with the activities of local authorities. 45% of respondents thought that the administrative reform (of 1999) has not had any impact on ordinary people (CBOS 21/2001). It should be emphasised that the positive assessment increased since then by over 20% (CBOS 082/18).

Figure 3. Opinion about the mayor.

Source: CBOS 082/18

- 54 The respondents are convinced that the development of their place of residence or nearest regions depends on local commune/city government (59%) and initiatives, activities of the residents themselves (46%). 39% point to the EU and only 28% to central authorities (Figure 4). Nevertheless, 57% of respondents believe that the residents have not enough influence on local affairs, on what happens in a city or commune (CBOS, 2018a). These results demonstrate that Polish citizens consider the role of local authorities as important and it might be interpreted as an indicator of grassroots regionalisation. By reference to the significance of residents' engagement in local affairs the respondents see themselves as subject and not object of the local policy. Despite this declaration almost half of respondents (44%), when asked for their involvement in local activities, is passive. Nearly one third (31%) were involved in one or two activities, and only one quarter showed more diversified activity (25%) (CBOS, 74, 2018).

Figure 4. Assessment of agents of local development.

Source: CBOS 82 (2018)

- 55 The decentralisation reforms aim at involving the residents in the decision making process. The social engagement of citizens for their community, participation in elections and local affairs, sense of subjectivity could be indicators of embedded democracy. According to the polls, most respondents (64%) believe that in their municipality local authorities take into account the voice of residents when taking decisions. 24% are of the opposite opinion. However, 66% admit that they are not aware of any possibilities and tools for cooperation between the residents and local authorities to improve the situation of the local community. The majority (35%) of those respondents who declared awareness of those tools, mentioned the possibility of direct meetings and discussions with representatives of the authorities, including the organisation of open meetings for residents. A quarter (24%) pointed to civic initiatives, social campaigns and civic projects (CBOS 46, 2018).
- 56 Then, for the majority of respondent (71%) the local elections are the most important, followed by presidential elections (66%), parliament elections (61%) and elections to the European Parliament (47%) (CBOS 120, 2018). When comparing the results with the previous measurements the importance of local elections has increased significantly.
- 57 The results of the opinion polls discussed above indicate the role of local authorities among Polish citizens has increased. They are interested in development of their local community and evaluate local authorities positively which might be interpreted as an indicator of grassroots regionalisation. They seem to support the decentralisation of the governance structure and attribute responsibility for the development of their place of residence to local and not central government.

Sense of belonging

- 58 According to the CBOS surveys (151/2016 and 105/2018), which asked inter alia for meaning of patriotism and sense of belonging, the majority of Poles (88%) regard themselves as patriots and only 7% identify themselves as nationalists. However, for half of the respondents the difference between nationalism and patriotism is not clear. 70% are proud of being Polish citizens. Patriotism means for them showing respect for the emblem, flag and national anthem (98%), nurturing Polish traditions (96%), knowing of the history of the country (95%) and participation in elections (90%).
- 59 However, it should be emphasised that 85% of Polish respondents interpret patriotism as activities and engagement for the local community. This attachment to the local community confirm the findings of another CBOS polls (CBOS 165 (2015), 100 (2018)). The respondents were asked what they feel attached to. As the figure below demonstrates, the majority identify themselves with the local community of the place where they live. Only 4% declared an attachment to Europe and 25% identify with Poland. The majority (82%) of respondents prefer to live in Poland than living abroad. As the main reasons for this, they declare their attachment to homeland, tradition language and patriotism, followed by rootedness and family ties. When comparing these results with the EU level, 89% of EU citizens feel attached to their city, town or village, and 92% to their country and above 50% to the European Union (Standard Eurobarometer 87/2017).

Figure 5. Sense of belonging of Polish citizens.

Source: own compilation on the basis of CBOS 165 (2015) and 100 (2018)

- 60 The respondents did not declare an attachment to Europe, however, according to the poll conducted in 2014 (CBOS 52/2014) on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Polish membership in the EU, 41% of Poles interviewed regard themselves as Poles and Europeans in comparison to 55% of them who regard themselves only as Poles. Only 2% put European identity on the first place before Polish and 1% perceive themselves only as European (CBOS 52/2014). But, 80% of Polish respondents feel they are citizens of the EU and 49% think that their voice counts in the EU (Standard Eurobarometer 87/2017).

- 61 Thus, it can be argued that although the local identity is the most prevalent among Polish respondents, they do, however, feel a strong bond with Europe, as the following illustrates.

Support for European integration

- 62 For the last two years over 80% of Polish respondents have declared support for Poland's membership in the EU. The majority of respondents (52%) do not think that the EU limits the sovereignty of Poland (CBOS 31/2016 and 50/2017). When asked about the future of the EU, as the figure below illustrates, the majority support deeper integration among all member states. Almost one third wants to maintain the status quo and 13% would like to limit integration and increase the role of nation states (CBOS 50/2017).

Figure 6. Assessment of the future of Poland and the EU.

Source: own compilation on the basis of CBOS 50 (2017)

- 63 As far as the assessment of the EU by the young Polish citizens (15-24 years) is regarded, the poll conducted by the Bertelsmann Foundation and the Institute of Public Affairs demonstrates that a majority of young Poles (76%) have a positive view of European integration. 64% of respondents think that Poland should stay in the EU and work to reform it. Only 21% would support a Pol-exit. Which benefits do they see in the European integration? The greatest benefit respondents see in the European integration (76% of respondents) is maintaining peace among the member states of the EU, followed by opportunities to settle/work in another EU country (72%) and no border checks in the Schengen zone (63%) (Łada and Wenerski, 2017).
- 64 Taking the Eurobarometer (87/2017) survey into consideration, the majority of respondents (56%) are optimistic for the future of the EU. Even more optimistic are the Polish citizens with the highest score (69%) among the new member states. Over three

quarters (80%) of Polish respondents agree with the statement that the EU project offers a future perspective for Europe's youth (Special Eurobarometer 467/2017).

- 65 Nevertheless, the majority of respondents think that Poland does not have sufficient influence on EU decisions and actions (see Figure 7 below).

Figure 7. Assessment of Poland's impact on EU affairs.

Source: CBOS 166 (2018)

Assessment of regional policy

- 66 Regional policy is the main tool of the European Union to reduce differences in wealth between member states by facilitating the creation of jobs, economic growth and sustainable development. Regional policy is delivered by the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund. In cooperation with the European Commission the national and regional authorities are responsible for managing the funds¹¹. Due to the partnership agreement between Poland and the European Commission in the period 2014-2020 Poland is the largest beneficiary of the Cohesion Policy with 77.6 billion EUR¹². Are Polish citizens aware of being such a great beneficiary from the EU? How do they assess the use of EU funds?
- 67 By evaluating the results of the Flash Eurobarometer (2017) on citizens' awareness and perception of EU regional policy, Poles, with 80%, come top of those who have heard of EU co-financed projects (the EU average is 35%). Above three quarters (78%) of respondents believe that the impact of EU co-financed projects on the development of their city or region has been positive. Again, Poland achieved the highest scores. When asked about the impact of EU co-financed projects on the development of the city or region of the respondents, 94% of Poles think that the impact is positive, compared to

1% that classify it as negative. Close to a quarter of EU respondents say that they have benefited in their daily life from a project funded by the ERDF or the Cohesion Fund. In Poland 67% share this opinion.

Figure 8. Primarily level of governance.

Source: own compilation on the basis of Flash Eurobarometer 452 (2017)

- 68 As the figure above shows, a majority of EU respondents (55%) believe that decisions should be taken at subnational levels, with 30% opting for the regional level and 25% favouring the local level. In Poland, the majority of respondents think that decision on EU regional policy projects should be primarily taken at the local level (38%), followed by regional level (30%), national level (19%) and EU level (9%). This demonstrates certainly the trust of Polish respondents to regional and local authorities in implementing of EU regional policy. Polish citizens are also the most aware (54% to 22% of EU average) of cooperation between regions from different countries because of EU funding.
- 69 Also, the poll conducted on the national level confirms the result of a good evaluation of the impact of EU funds on Poland's development (CBOS 155/2016). When asked about the usage of the EU funds, 70% of respondents think that Poland uses the EU funds in a right way. 87% of respondents were of the opinion that many positive changes could occur in Poland thanks to EU funds. Also 71% think that due to funding from the EU, positive changes can be noticed at the local level. The vast majority (87%) of interviewees appreciate the positive changes that have taken place since 2004 in their region/voivodship and in their locality (82%).
- 70 In light of the above-analysed polls, I will argue that the internalisation of regionalisation process by Polish citizens has turned out well, but there also some weaknesses. On the basis of surveys results the table below synthesise pros and cons of grassroots regionalisation.

Table 1. Public opinion towards local/regional governments in Poland.

Pros	Cons
<p>Since the implementation of the administrative reform in Poland positive assessment of the work of local authorities has increased by 20%.</p> <p>The majority of respondents believe that the development of their place of residence or nearest regions depends on local commune/city government.</p> <p>46% of respondents feel that the activities and initiatives of residents have an impact on the development of communes.</p> <p>The majority of respondents believe that the residents' voice is regarded by local decision-making process.</p> <p>The number of residents who consider the local elections as the most important has significantly increased in the last years.</p> <p>The majority of respondents feel attached to their local community and a vast number of them consider patriotism as activity for the local community.</p> <p>The majority of respondents support Poland's integration with the EU.</p> <p>Above three quarters of respondents assess the impact of EU co-financed projects on the development of their city or region positively and that decision on implementation of regional policy should be taken at local level.</p>	<p>44% of respondents are not involved in any local activity.</p> <p>66% of respondents are not aware of any instruments of cooperation between local governments and citizens.</p> <p>72% of respondents think that Poland does not have sufficient influence on the EU affairs.</p>

Conclusions

- 71 This article traces Poland's regionalisation path in its evolution, obstacles and developments. This presentation is completed with a study of general trends in the attitudes of Polish citizens towards local/regional actors, EU membership and regional policy.
- 72 A region may provide a focus for the identity of its inhabitants and it can be an economic or governmental unit, as Michael Keating claims (2004, xi). After the fall of communism Poland very quickly undertook the decentralisation reforms. The accession to the European Union was the main goal of Poland's policy, however according to the literature the most significant drivers of reforms were internal – striving for rebuilding of local/regional structures according to the own party interests. It must be emphasised, that after a hundred years of centralisation and homogenisation strategies, this task of implementing regional administration and regional consciousness was not easy. However, in a period of less than 10 years, the decentralisation of administrative structures was completed, and in 2004 Poland became the EU member with the greatest EU funds absorption.
- 73 Nonetheless, since 2015 some recentralisations tendencies could be observed. The limitation of competences of the sub-state authorities as in environmental protection, ignoring their opinion by introducing the education reform as well as delegating certain tasks without transferring appropriate financial resources to complete them are alarming examples. In addition, central government remains still the significant source of funding for regional development.

- 74 When taking into account the public opinion polls, the majority of respondents assess the activity of local authorities positively. They feel their voice is regarded by decision taking process in local affairs. The respondents are aware of EU regional policy, assess the use of funds well and would wish that the decisions on regional projects were taken primarily at local and regional levels. In regards to the issue of their attachment, they feel mainly attached to their place of residence.
- 75 Moreover, the respondents show a high appreciation of the changes to their country, region, locality that have taken place thanks to EU funds. Although the attitude of the current Polish government towards the EU seems to be one of suspicion, a majority of adults, as well as young Poles, are optimistic about the future of the EU. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that among all member states, Polish respondents are the most aware of the EU regional policy. For many years the support for Poland's integration within the EU has stayed at very high level. People see various benefits in being a member state as securing peace, job and education opportunities and free movement. They consider the local and regional levels of governance as the most appropriate to decide on the management of EU funds. This proves that the distribution of EU funds is mainly well perceived by Polish citizens, who also show trust in their local and regional representatives to respond the needs and problems of the regional and local communities. These first results call for an in-depth analysis of the regional/local implementation of EU projects, and of the citizen's perceptions. Only in this way a causal relationship could be substantiated, which will be all the more interesting at a time when European construction is facing, in various aspects, certain turbulences.
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NOTES

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ABSTRACTS

Up until the fall of the Iron Curtain Poland was institutionally and ideologically a unitary state. The accession process to the European Union enforced the adoption of necessary reforms of the administrative structures, which were undertaken in the 1990s. Since then Poland has developed a three-tier governance structure and enhanced the role of regional authorities by implementing regional development strategies and the managing of EU funds.

Applying the theoretical concepts of regionalisation and regionalism, this paper seeks to analyse in the first part the decentralisation reforms in Poland and their major achievements and challenges. The second part of the article, based on the evaluation of national and EU polls, addresses the questions regarding citizen's assessment of local authorities, regional policy, their attitude toward the EU and finally the feeling of attachment to locality/region, country or Europe.

Bis zum Fall des Eisernen Vorhangs war Polen institutionell und ideologisch ein Einheitsstaat. Erst der Beitrittsprozess zur Europäischen Union hat die Durchführung der notwendigen Reformen der Verwaltungsstrukturen herbeigeführt, die in den 90er Jahren implementiert wurden. Seitdem hat Polen eine dreistufige Verwaltungsstruktur entwickelt und die Rolle der regionalen Behörden gestärkt, indem sie regionale Entwicklungsstrategien umsetzen und einen Teil EU-Mitteln verwalten.

Dieser Beitrag hat zum Ziel, die Dezentralisierungsreformen in Polen ihre wichtigsten Effekte und Herausforderungen zu analysieren, was im ersten Teil bei der Anwendung der theoretischen Konzepte der Regionalisierung/des Regionalismus erfolgt. Der zweite Teil des Beitrags, der auf der Auswertung von nationalen und EU-Umfragen basiert, befasst sich mit den Fragen der Evaluierung der Selbstverwaltung und der Regionalpolitik durch die Bürger, ihrer Haltung gegenüber der EU und schließlich ihrer Verbundenheit mit der Ortschaft/der Region, dem Land oder Europa.

INDEX

Keywords: regionalisation, identification, Poland, Europeanisation, sub-national level

Schlüsselwörter: Regionalisierung, Identifikation, Polen, Europäisierung, sub-nationale Ebene

AUTHOR

ELŻBIETA OPIŁOWSKA

University of Wrocław (Poland), Center for Regional and Borderlands Studies, Institute of
Sociology, elzbieta.opilowska@uwr.edu.pl