

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN THE POLYCENTRIC ENVIRONMENT – A (NOT) NEW RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Background. Subsequent research of polycentric systems was associated with the processes of metropolisation and seeking solutions to efficiently manage complex territorial structures. This approach, however, was superseded by the approach of multi-level governance. The authors propose a return to the polycentric theory, accepting it as the theoretical framework for research on functional urban areas, which are in Poland the new paradigm of co-operation of territorial units.

Research aims. The article is to draw attention to the polycentric approach as a useful framework of research in the area of public management and to verify how the organisation of functional urban areas corresponds to polycentric systems, matching relations between the participating actors and the system of distribution of power and influence.

Methodology. The article has been based on the discourse analysis as well as the analysis of the content of reports and other documents.

Key findings. Functional urban areas bear the hallmarks of polycentric systems, therefore, it seems advisable to apply the polycentric approach to their research. Moreover, the polycentrism is free from the deficiencies of MLG. In addition, the polycentric approach gives greater opportunity for interpretation and classification of inter-institutional relations.

Keywords: polycentrism, multi-level governance, theory, functional urban areas, Poland.

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INTRODUCTION

Polycentrism as a theoretical approach which appeared in the United States in the 1950s in tests relating to the cooperation and interoperability of independent actors, having similar decision-making powers. This approach, initially applied to the phenomena of overlapping and cross-jurisdictional governance of cooperating entities, over time gave rise to the creation of governance model networks, such as network governance and collaborative governance. Multiple approaches of governance dominated the literature on public management (Bevir, 2011; Levi-Faur, 2012). The polycentric approach remained as an important analytical perspective in both international and European studies (Kennan, 1964; James, 2002; Kumar & Messner, 2011).

Despite the weaknesses (for more on the subject see Pawłowska, 2016), governance approach has many supporters. Limited analytical capabilities, however, are forcing them to resort to the classical social theories, like the theory of institutionalism, public choice theory, or decision-making theory. On the other hand, institutionalists, reluctant to accept governance approaches, indicate greater adaptability of the polycentric approach – based on the experience of the market – to the public sector (McGinnis & Ostrom, 2011). Tentatively, we define the polycentric approach – after Algica and Tarko – as a social system of “many decision centres having limited and autonomous prerogatives and operating under an overarching set of rules” (2012, p. 237). We are of the opinion that the polycentric theory is a better frame of theoretical research on the relations between the equal sub-state actors than the frequently used approach of multi-level governance (MLG), as the latter is – firstly, politically motivated (MLG was recommended by the European Commission White Paper on European Governance); secondly, it is multi-threaded, both in the subjective dimension (it can refer to a variety of actors – public and private) and functional dimension (it can refer to both vertical and horizontal relations). Multidimensionality of governance makes its theoretical framework on the one hand, attractive, and on the other hand it contributes to blurring the boundaries between concepts and the phenomena it describes.

This article aims to draw attention to the polycentric approach as a useful framework of research in the area of public management.

This is not a new approach, however, it was abandoned in favour of another theoretical framework (MLG), not necessarily better in terms of the offered conceptual grid and analytical capabilities. The turn toward polycentric layouts was determined by the methodologically handicapped MLG approach and searching for the appropriate theoretical framework for the study on the functional urban areas (FUA) in Poland. Therefore, our objective is also to corroborate the validity of the polycentric approach in the exploration of the FUA.

In the first part of the article, the previously undertaken research on polycentric systems and using a polycentric approach will be discussed. Then a critical analysis of the MLG approach will proceed. This will lead us to justify the choice of the polycentric approach, also motivated by the subject of the research, i.e. FUA, the characteristics of which will be presented in the final part of the article.

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON POLYCENTRIC SYSTEMS

Taking into account the focus of the research, i.e. FUA, studies of polycentric systems related to the management of metropolitan structures are particularly important. The analysis of the cooperation of the territorial units in developing metropolitan areas was dominated by an administrative approach, and the problems of the metropolis and surrounding areas were considered largely in the context of their delimitation and the establishment of administrative units corresponding to the exceptionality of a given area, which constantly transforms and is characterised by numerous variables and functions, as well as having a wide impact on neighbouring areas.

The delimitation of metropolitan areas and their competitiveness – as a condition of territorial development – has been the subject of interest of the European Community since the beginning of the 1990s. This issue was pursued within the framework of urban studies and spatial planning (Eurostat, 1992, 1993; Parkinson, 1997; Parkinson *et al.*, 2003; Begg, 1999; Van Den Berg *et al.*, 2008; Salet, Thornley & Kreukels, 2003; Healy, 1997). Polycentrism, as a basis for spatial planning has been the approach recommended by The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999) since the end of the 1990s. At the same time it has been the theoretical basis for research by ESPON (ESPON, 2005; Waterhout, 2002; Tatzberger,

2008). ESPON studies took into account the functional and morphological dimensions of polycentric systems, but at the same time indicated the existence of differences in these types of structures depending on the level at which they are created. Their goal was to find links between the metropolisation processes and the functioning of polycentric systems, and thus verify the extent to which metropolitan areas this type of structures.

The administrative approach is also characteristic for OECD's reports. In the 2006 report, a proposal for the criteria for polycentric metropolitan systems was presented (OECD, 2006). Based on the ESPON studies, it assumed that there are metropolitan areas that meet the criteria of polycentric systems: those where there is no dominant urban centre, and the existing centres have comparable potential. At the same time, polycentrism should be seen in three dimensions: morphological, functional (the socio-economic dimension and flow range), and managerial (the presence of inter-institutional agreements on organisational issues, the instruments used and common institutions created) (ESPON, 2005). The relationships within the polycentric system have barely been investigated. As the authors of this report indicate, it is necessary to refer to studies from the 1960s, whereby their operational value today is small due to the changes that have taken place in the public sphere, and also the conceptual grid used and the adoption of new approaches to the management of territorial arrangements. The popularity of the concept of spatial management, visible since the 1990s, has not contributed to a deeper interest in relationships (including power and influence) between the actors of territorial systems. Polycentric structures, which were set up as network structures, have been studied especially for the effectiveness of implemented tasks (cf. Camagni, 1993; Batten, 1995; Meijers, 2007).

Studies on the adaptive mechanisms of the polycentric systems deserve separate attention. In theory, these systems should be based on self-regulation (McGinnis, 1999, 2005). This, in turn – according to Lindblom – requires mutual adjustment of the involved actors, which can be difficult in the context of a strongly fragmented and decentralized system (Lindblom, 1979). As pointed out by E. Ostrom, polycentric structures may be resistant to changes in the environment (political, economic), but it is difficult to point to a universal model to ensure their efficiency and durability. The wide range of conditions

affecting the ability to cooperate means that virtually all polycentric systems operate on a unique basis, although it is important to conduct a analyses and identify “best practices” which other entities with less-developed skills of cooperation could follow (Ostrom, 2005; McGinnis, 2005). E. Ostrom did not deal with the issue of conflict in polycentric systems, but merely indicated that it might occur due to the incapacity of an organisation with this type of structure, or the existence of “local tyrannies”. This can lead to insoluble judicial conflicts, which will have an impact on the effectiveness of the governance system (Ostrom, 2005; McGinnis, 2005).

In Poland, polycentrism in relation to spatial planning and regional development was studied by, among others, P. Churski and J. Hauke (2012). Polycentric systems were also the subject of research carried out at the Centre for European Regional and Local Studies, the University of Warsaw (EUROREG). Their goal was to determine the impact of the EU cohesion policy on the processes of development in urban areas in Poland (EUROREG, 2010). In addition, within the framework of the ESPON project, EUROREG carried out research with reference to spatial planning, urban economic development, urban and rural bonds, as well as the areas of strategic intervention and strategic approach to the implementation of public policies (Olechnicka *et al.*, 2014). Cooperation of territorial units in metropolitan areas was also the subject of EUROREG’s research (Smętkowski *et al.*, 2012) along with cooperation between territorial actors to improve the efficiency of public services (Płoszaj, 2014). The studies of institutional cooperation in metropolitan areas, led by M. Lackowska (2009a, 2009b, 2009c) fit in this area of exploration. She referred to multi-level governance, anchored in the study of decision-making structures in the EU, pointing to some overlap between policy making in the EU and the metropolitan management. Issues of intercommunal cooperation have also been analysed by R. Pyka in his study on governance in French metropolitan areas (Pyka, 2014).

The relationships between the actors in polycentric systems have rarely been the subject of research (except in the international relations theory) conducted in Europe in general and in Poland in particular. Meanwhile, as pointed out by V. Ostrom, polycentric systems have a strong political dimension (1972). Their “political nature” has been “lost” in the governance approach (and its variations), focusing on partnerships and collaboration, and overlooking

the diversity of actors, including their potentials and political ambitions (the aforementioned research of Lackowska stands out against this background). And yet, the relationships inside polycentric systems may take different forms – from typical partnerships, so strongly pushed through by the governance approach (especially multi-level governance), to conflict, which may be a consequence of the disintegration of the polycentric structure. Conflict and power are inextricably linked, especially in the case of multi-stakeholder structures in which the striving for influence and access to scarce resources are natural (Coppens, 2014).

To summarise the current state of research on polycentric systems: it concerns the metropolitan areas, delimitation of boundaries corresponding to their functions, and management models (Ostrom, Tiebout & Warren, 1961); and planning (ESPON, 2005), international relations, and supranational structures (the EU) (Wegener, 2013). Cooperative forms were seen and also studied due to their functionality and organisational and financial efficiency. The research focused mainly on finding solutions that would improve the effectiveness of the activities involved. Structures based on the cooperation of territorial units have not been analysed as distinctive because of the actors involved (local authorities). The conviction about the positive effects of cooperation, in view of a common goal, which at the same time ensured the coherence of such a structure, dominated the discourse (Lozny, 2010). The ways to create polycentric structures and organise them, and the implementation of internal and particularistic (explicit or implicit) interests were not investigated at their roots.

MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE – COMPETITIVE OR COMPLEMENTARY APPROACH?

In the introduction, it was noted that the polycentric approach did not have a chance to develop in the area of public management as a scientific discipline, primarily because the governance approach has gained popularity, and in relation to cooperation between government agencies and local government – a multi-level governance (MLG).

MLG is a specific, policy driven theory which was first defined by European Union experts in terms of “a polity creating process in which authority and policy-making influence are shared across

multiple levels of government – sub-national, national, and supra-national” (Marks, Hooghe & Blank, 1996, p. 342). The quoted authors’ initial aim was to describe a decision-making process that is shared by actors who represent different constituencies and have access to different political resources (Smith, 2011). Soon – writes A. Smith – MLG had gained the status of European integration theory, becoming a “conceptual umbrella” under which opponents of the intergovernmental approach in relation to the EU and realistic approach in international studies united their efforts (Smith, 2011, p. 301; Raczkowski, 2016, pp. 89–90).

Supra-national or international perspectives are not a point of interest in this article. MLG is interpreted here – after M. Bevir (2009) and M. Lackowska (2009c) – as the perception of relationships in the sub-national systems, and – despite its name – it is not only about the relationship of a horizontal nature limited to public entities, but also a vertical relationship of public and non-public actors. The heterogeneous nature of the MLG was noticed by L. Hooghe and G. Marks, who distinguished between two types of MLG. Type I is said to involve actors that have general competences, a territorial dimension, a limited number of tiers at which the actors operate, a degree of permanence and common institutional arrangements, and regular distribution of powers between the tiers involved (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). In MLG type I, co-operation occurs more often along the vertical axis than along the horizontal axis, while the MLG type II “involves more complexity and fluidity. It has no set of jurisdictional levels” (Bevir, 2009, p. 135). The actors involved in MLG type II are multiple and their number depends on the needs, coordination capacities, and the will to co-operate with other entities that are typical of public authorities.

The division into two types of MLG now appears out of date for two reasons. First, the characterisation of the relationship between government agencies as being primarily vertical in a situation of a far-reaching decentralisation of tasks and responsibilities, narrows their interpretation to guidance, coordination, control, and oversight; thus severely limiting the ability to comprehend these relationships. According to A. Smith, the only use of the term “level” for a description of the public authorities is problematic, since it largely implies inferiority-superiority relationships between territorial units (Smith, 2011, p. 302; see Chrabąszcz, 2015). Secondly, the division into two

types of MLG in the situation of blurring the boundaries between the public, private, and social sectors seems artificial. Cross-sectoriality is a characteristic feature of modern public management. Moreover, this is a gradated feature, i.e. dependent on the scope of participation and responsibility of actors anchored in various sectors.

For these reasons, A. Smith proposes a move away from the concept and approach of multi-level governance and suggests the use of the concept of multi-jurisdictional governance, which according to him accurately casts the nature of the relationships between the actors of distinct features situated within separate territorial units (Smith, 2011, p. 302).

The solution proposed by Smith does not eliminate the fundamental weaknesses of the MLG approach, i.e. lack of sufficient explanatory capacity. As M. Lackowska notes (after S. George) that “MLG does not offer a new explanatory theory, but only a tool for description” (Lackowska 2009c, p. 63). Despite this, she points to the usefulness of this approach in the study of metropolitan governance. Indeed, it may prove useful in the analysis of systems that R.C. Feiock describes as “constructed networks”, by which he understands the “mechanisms designed or coordinated by third parties such as higher-level government to structure multilateral relationships across related policy areas. A higher-level authority provides funds and incentives for actors to participate in collaborative service arrangements. Typically, a higher-level government designates a lead organisation with responsibility for developing, managing, and coordinating intergovernmental service provision” (Feiock, 2013, p. 402).

In the research on the FUA, the characteristics of “constructed networks” correspond to the capitals of provinces* and their functional areas, which we will justify later in this article. Therefore, despite objections to the MLG explanatory potential, we do not reject it entirely, but we designate it as being complementary to the polycentric approach, which – in our opinion – better serves the analysis and explanation of dispersed structures of power and influence in the FUA.

* In the decentralized system of public authorities in Poland, a province (or voivodship) corresponds to the regional level. There are two other tiers of self-governing territorial units, which are placed “below” the province – *powiat* (county) and *gmina* (municipality).

A POLYCENTRIC APPROACH AS THE THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE RESEARCH OF CROSS-TERRITORIAL STRUCTURES

The MLG approach sometimes opposes the approach of polycentric governance – PCG. It also sometimes happens that both approaches are equated with each other (Skelcher, 2005). But, while the founding of MLG corresponds to normative institutionalism, PCG is closer to rational-choice institutionalism; its protagonists were, among others, Elinor and Vincent Ostrom, who investigated the management of public services for metropolitan areas in the United States (McGinnis, 1999; Homsy & Warner, 2015). Hence, their approach describes “social systems of many decision centres having limited and autonomous prerogatives and operating under an overarching set of rules” (Algica & Tarko, 2012, p. 237). In the most general sense, “any given area can be defined polycentric if it contains two or more centres. (...) an area is polycentric if its population or employment is not concentrated to a substantial extent in one single centre” (Brezzi & Veneri, 2014, p. 4).

The polycentric system – in the interpretation of V. Ostrom, C.M. Tiebout, and R. Warren – means the operation of many, formally independent of each other, decision-making centres (Ostrom, Tiebout & Warren, 1961, p. 831). As they note, these systems are characterised by the patterns of cooperation, competition, and conflict. While the patterns of cooperation are conducive to the efficiency of the decision-making process, so much rivalry and conflict reduce the efficiency of joint operations. Nonetheless, “[i]f polycentric political system can resolve conflict and maintain competition within appropriate bounds it can be a viable arrangement for dealing with a variety of public problems in a metropolitan area”. If the participants in such a system adopt common rules of operation, the system as a whole maintains consistency, and its behaviour is predictable (Ostrom, Tiebout & Warren, 1961, p. 838).

These statements require a commentary relating to the subject of the research undertaken by E. and V. Ostrom and C. Tiebout. These were local government units located in the metropolitan areas of the United States. In the context of the high levels of mobility of the American society, competition and conflict between local authorities takes on a different dimension than that which we observe in Europe. The first effectively compete for new residents, which is a major barrier to joint

supra-local activities (McGinnis & Ostrom, 2011, p. 16). But these are necessary due to the problems of the metropolis, intractable in terms of individual local units, and duplicating services provided by them. In the 1960's, the general opinion was that "too many governments and too little governance" exist in metropolitan areas, that they are characterised by organisational chaos, which can be overcome only through the establishment of a single local/regional government for the entire metropolitan area (Ostrom, Tiebout & Warren, 1961, p. 831). The Ostroms, based on their research, noted that the "chaos" of a metropolis can be brought under control through cross-organisational and market-oriented arrangements, characterised by "both efficiency-inducing and error-correcting behavior" (Algica & Tarko, 2012, p. 242). They also contradict the thesis that smaller municipalities are less efficient than larger ones.

M. Polanyi pointed to the "spontaneous order" of polycentric systems, as their constitutive element. Spontaneous order means free entry and exit. If this freedom is limited, it is hardly spontaneous, and therefore polycentric. The second feature of the polycentric system is the adoption of overarching rules. In the polycentric system no actor has monopoly on the use of coercion, therefore all the actors must respect the principle of the supremacy of the rules, which they have accepted as a basis for action. At the same time, they have the right – which is the third feature of the polycentric system – to change the rules of conduct in a manner accepted by other actors ("there should be rules on changing rules") (Algica & Tarko, 2012, pp. 246–247).

Therefore, the polycentric system is more than numerous actors, independent from each other, this is "a complex system of powers, incentives, rules, values, and individual attitudes combined in a complex system of relationships at different levels" (Algica & Tarko, 2012, p. 247). Algica and Tarko develop this definition indicating features of the polycentric system that are characterised by:

- numerous decision-making centres;
- "ordered relationships that persist in time";
- "many legitimate rules enforcers";
- "single system of rules";
- "centres of power at different organisational levels";
- "spontaneous order resulting from free entry and exit";
- "the alignment between rules and incentives";
- "the public involvement in rule design" (p. 254).

The above characteristics of polycentric systems constitute for Algica and Tarko the grid for the principles of polycentric approach. These principles are presented in the Table 1.

While MLG proceeds “in the shadow” of the hierarchy, its rules are generally well-defined, roles and stakeholders are predetermined, the polycentric approach refers to peer interactions of actors, with similar potentials, but possibly imbalanced interests. Still the issue of hierarchical relationships in the context of a polycentric system does not appear to be so simple, since the external actors can impose their own rules of action. This happens in the case of some FUA (capitals of provinces and their functional areas), whose creation was determined by the decisions of third parties.

On the basis of the indicators of a polycentric approach and their possible variations mentioned in Table 1, Algica and Tarko pointed to the possibility of the appearance of 288 different types of polycentric systems. Many of them are only hypothetical and do not actually exist. Nevertheless, this diversity gives a number of possibilities to explain how distinct communities and local institutions cope with a challenge of collective action (McGinnis, 1999; Feiock, 2013).

FUNCTIONAL URBAN AREAS AS DISPERSED STRUCTURES OF POWER AND INFLUENCE

The institutional separation of functionally related territorial units is a challenge for the planning of local/regional development and management of public services. In the latter case, an effective and thus far sufficient solution was the assignment of services to neighbouring administrative units and the creation of municipal unions. However, in the longer term, these steps do not serve local development, because they do not create the conditions for an integrated territorial approach based on the use of endogenous potentials, integration of public action, and the system of co-governance.

The impulse to institutionalise FUA was the structural constraint, expressed in the Partnership Agreement (MIR, 2014), which obliges capital cities of provinces* and their functional areas to work in one of the recommended forms of partnership (association, administrative

* By “the capital city of a province” we understand the city where the authorities of the province and the representative of the state authorities – *wojewoda* (governor) reside.

arrangement, other solutions) (MRR, 2013a). The institutionalisation of other functional areas (sub-regional and local) is discretionary, however also in this case available forms of institutionalisation were limited, as in the case of capital cities.

The Partnership Agreement defines FUA in relation to the instrument of territorial development – Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI). ITIs are implemented mandatorily in capital cities and their functional areas (CCFA) (MRR, 2013a, p. 3). Thus, both the institutionalisation of cooperation of administrative units that make up the CCFA and the delimitation of functional areas, as a rule, have been the subject of decisions, which were beyond the interested local governments. Although the Partnership Agreement stipulates that the area of the implementation of the “regional ITI” is the subject of a decision of the board of the province (*zarząd województwa*).

Discretionary ITIs are carried out in the sub-regional cities and their functional areas (SRCFA). The decision to implement sub-regional ITIs belongs to the provincial authorities which carry out the delimitation of SRCFA in consultation with the relevant local authorities, and finally take a decision to this effect in the form of a resolution of the province’s board.

We assume that both CCFA and SRCFA are polycentric structures. Nevertheless, the MLG approach in EU policy, as seriously determining the formation and functioning of territorial structures, has to be considered. The establishment of CCFA was mandatory and generally left only the possibility of administrative delimitation of the area surrounding capital cities – in line with the principles and criteria of delimitation adopted by the Ministry of Regional Development – to the concerned regional and local governments (MRR, 2013b, pp. 6–26). These principles of CCFA delimitation were as following:

- 1) administrative principles:
 - a) the core of the CCFA was to be the capital city of the province (and in some cases the city bordering with it – as is the case of the CCFAs of Gdańsk and Katowice),
 - b) the boundaries of CCFA could not exceed the limits of the province;
- 2) topological principles:
 - a) the area CCFA was supposed to be “spatially continuous”, meaning that only contiguous municipalities could create it,
 - b) each municipality could belong only to one CCFA;

- 3) the principle of compliance with the minimum number of criteria – a municipality could be incorporated into CCFA if it fulfilled at least 6 of 7 detailed criteria*.

The top-down model of CCFA delimitation was motivated by the will to: harmonise the existing delimitation of functional areas (in the form of zones, and urban metropolitan areas); develop the tools for comparing the growth of urban areas around the country; conduct a transparent territorial policy; and monitor the development policy. In addition, the CCFA delimitation was considered as a priority due to the growing role of cities in the economic development of the country.

In order to achieve the objectives of the National Spatial Development Concept (NSDC) 2030, 18 CCFA were designed, which are to be included in the zoning plans of provinces. Strategic and planning documents are to be prepared for each CCFA as well (MRR, 2013b, pp. 6, 10; KPZK, 2011). The coercive nature of CCFA creation is further evidenced by the fact that municipalities, which were supposed to be a part of the CCFA, and would not be interested in joining the CCFA, may have restricted access to financial support under regional programs (MRR, 2013a, p. 4). The process of delimitation of the SRCFA was not regulated top-down, but resulted from negotiations between interested municipalities and the authorities of the province (MRR, 2013a, p. 5).

FUA have been generally drawn up in order to pursue consistent and territorially oriented activities (ITIs) within their area, on the basis of the previously designed strategic document for the area (ITI Strategy). Financial incentives also stand behind the creation of FUA and the implementation of ITIs – emerging institutional structures apply for financial support from EU funds (MRR, 2013a, p. 4).

The implementation of ITIs assumes that engaged local authorities will undertake joint ventures with support from the European Regional Development Fund and the European Cohesion Fund. These joint ventures, based on endogenous resources, will help to resolve common

* Detailed criteria were: 1) the number of inhabitants commuting to work to the capital city per 1,000 inhabitants of working age – to exceed 50; 2) the number of residents migrating to the capital city per 1,000 inhabitants – to exceed 3; 3) share of employed in non-agricultural professions as a ratio to the average number in the province – to exceed 75%; 4) the number of businesses enterprises per 1,000 inhabitants as a ratio to the average number in the province – to exceed 75%; 5) the share of enterprises of highly specialised services (ICT, finances, marketing, R + D, etc.) in relation to the capital city – to exceed 50%; 6) the population density in relation to the average in the province – to exceed 50%; 7) the number of dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants completed in the period 2002–2011 compared to the average in the province – to exceed 75% (Śleszyński, 2013, p. 186).

problems in a comprehensive manner. Furthermore, ITIs will promote partnership cooperation between local governments, the integration of activities and increase the impact of the FUA on cohesion policy (MRR, 2013a, p. 4).

As A. Noworól indicates, creating and taking action within the FUA requires changes in the model of territorial management. It is necessary to take into account two main factors. Firstly, the specificity and the socio-economic and spatial nature of municipal cooperation. Secondly, the management of such a complex and multi-stakeholder structure is difficult as it is not an independent entity with a distinct formal status. Thus, it is not the local authority *per se* (Noworól, 2014, p. 103–104). Therefore, it can be considered a polycentric structure, which – using the determinants of a polycentric approach by Algica and Tarko – is characterised by:

- a) a multiplicity of decision-making centres, but with limited capability of applying their own methods of operation, because of the need for arrangements that were made at the EU level (Partnership Agreement), national level (Ministry of Regional Development), and regional level (boards of provinces); as well as the legal framework relating to the dispatching of funds deriving from the EU; possession of convergent, though not necessarily common goals – the goals of actors of FUA, as a rule, are to be compatible and linked to the objectives and tasks planned for the whole FUA (MRR, 2013a, p. 5);
- b) the overarching system of rules, largely established by external actors, approved by the decision-making centres, whose jurisdiction is anchored in the territory, recognising the imposed rules of operation, due to the common motivation (access to finance) – the imperative formalization of cooperation between actors in order to accomplish ITI affects the nature of their relationship, which – depending on the selected set of formal and legal rules – can be characterized by the dominance of one actor (municipal union) or dispersed power and influence (association or covenant);
- c) “spontaneity” order depends on the type of the FUA in relation to the “entrance” to a polycentric system, but may be limited when it comes to the “exit”; information on the “exit” is public

* In some cases, the institutionalisation of the FUA was associated with an indication of the time of their duration (for example, Rzeszów Functional Area was created for a period up to 31 December 2022) (Porozumienie...).

and “exit” is formally possible, and depends on the legal form of the FUA (union, association, covenant). However, the “exit” of one of the actors, meaning withholding from further cooperation, will result in the disintegration of a polycentric system (as a result of the impossibility of further use of financial support by other actors). Structural constraints may turn out to be the key bonding feature of the FUA, but it also limits their spontaneous order.

The above description is complemented by the reference to the criteria of analysis of polycentric systems proposed by Algica and Tarko (Table 1). Yet, this description should be considered as hypothetical, and this is in connection with: firstly, the initial stage of development of the relations of power and influence in the FUA; secondly, the preliminary stage of the research into polycentric systems.

Table 1. Principles and criteria of analysis of polycentric systems according to Algica and Tarko

Principles of polycentric approach	Criteria of analysis	Complementary criteria of analysis (if applicable)	FUA as polycentric structures
Multiplicity of decision centres (DC)	capability of DC to implement their different methods of operation	–	limited capability of applying own methods of operation
	autonomous decision-making layers in DC		multi-layered and multi-centred decision making process
	aims of DC	common/shared individual	convergent (not necessarily common) aims
Overarching system of rules	compatibility of the incentives and rules	–	incentives and rules are (mostly) compatible
	jurisdiction	territorial	territorial jurisdiction
		non-territorial	
	actors designing rules	actors of the polycentric system	largely established by external actors, approved by the DC
		external actor	
	collective choice	individual decisions	consensus and (at times barely reached as a result of reciprocal bargain)
consensus			
majority voting			

Table 1. cont.

Principles of polycentric approach	Criteria of analysis	Complementary criteria of analysis (if applicable)	FUA as polycentric structures
Spontaneous order	entry	free entry (the newcomer alone decides about entry to the system and “insiders” cannot prevent it)	merit-based entry
		spontaneous entry (neither the newcomer nor the “insiders” decide on the entry to the system – participation in the system is natural)	
		merit-based entry (the newcomer needs to have defined features to enter the system)	
	exit	free exit	formally free exit, depending on the legal form of FUA
		constraint exit	
	information	public information	public information
private (restrained) information			

Source: own elaboration based on Algica & Tarko, 2012, p. 254-257.

CONCLUSIONS

According to A. Noworól, not only does the concept of territorial management need modification, but also the paradigm of theoretical consideration on these systems. A polycentric approach, consisting of: multiple, independent and autonomous decision-making centres, rules and principles of mutual relations, as well as the flexibility of connections and cooperation, is a suitable theoretical framework for the analysis of systems of power and influence in the FUA. Polycentrism is free from the deficiencies of MLG, marked by the hierarchical relationships of actors. Furthermore, the polycentric approach is substantially anchored in the study of American metropolitan governance, which coincides with the proposed research on the FUA, also marked by the need for coordinated activities of local authorities. For the authors of the present paper, placing research on the FUA in the polycentric framework means a return to the origins of urban policy studies.

Appealing to polycentrism is also corroborated by the system of territorial government itself, which in Poland was conceived as polycentric. Existing local/regional governments are lawfully autonomous, although functionally related. They have no formal grounds to influence the decisions of neighbouring authorities or those of a higher/lower tier. Therefore, in need of better coordination of local and regional activities, national authorities refer to formal and structural coercion. This is why we cannot reject the MLG approach completely as a canon of interpretation of the links between public authorities – starting from national, ending with municipal: all the more so that the EU's cohesion policy is created and implemented with the extensive use of a multi-level approach. This is our justification for the complementarity of the MLG in relation to a polycentric approach, recognising, however, the latter as leading.

The research which this article refers to is at the preliminary stage. The diagnosis of the FUA in Poland, the institutionalisation of which is a consequence of the adoption of the Europe 2020 strategy and new instruments for the implementation of the EU cohesion policy (Europa 2020, 2010), has already been made. The institutionalisation of the FUA is particularly interesting because of the configurations of the influence of individual actors on the legal form and the selection of territorial units forming the FUA was being revealed at this stage. The interpretation of the polycentric approach by P.D. Aligica and V. Tarko seems to be particularly useful in the study of the institutionalisation of the FUA. It provides many possibilities to explain and categorise polycentric structures; moreover, it allows the capture the dynamics of their changes, and accordingly classify them as another variant of the polycentric system. Furthermore, the proposal of Aligica and Tarko may be supplemented by additional indicators of the polycentric approach. So it is not a "finite" theory, it can be further developed alongside the progress in research on polycentric systems.

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ZARZĄDZANIE PUBLICZNE W ŚRODOWISKU POLICENTRYCZNYM – (NIE) NOWA PERSPEKTYWA BADAWCZA

Abstrakt

Tło badań. Dotychczasowe badania systemów policentrycznych były związane głównie z procesami metropolizacji i poszukiwania rozwiązań służących efektywnemu zarządzaniu złożonymi strukturami terytorialnymi. Podejście to zostało jednak wyparte przez perspektywę *multi-level governance* (MLG). Autorki proponują powrót do teorii policentrycznej, przyjmując ją jako ramę teoretyczną badań nad relacjami w miejskich obszarach funkcjonalnych, będących w Polsce nowym paradygmatem współpracy jednostek terytorialnych.

Cel badań. Artykuł ma na celu zwrócenie uwagi na podejście policentryczne jako użyteczną ramę badań w dziedzinie zarządzania publicznego oraz zweryfikowanie, na ile sposób organizacji miejskich obszarów funkcjonalnych odpowiada układom policentrycznym, właściwym im relacjom między uczestniczącymi podmiotami oraz systemowi dystrybucji władzy i wpływu.

Metodologia. Artykuł został napisany na podstawie analizy dyskursu oraz analizy zawartości raportów i innych dokumentów.

Kluczowe wnioski. Miejskie obszary funkcjonalne noszą znamiona systemów policentrycznych, zatem wskazane wydaje się zastosowanie do ich badania podejścia policentrycznego, tym bardziej że policentryzm jest wolny od ułomności MLG (np. hierarchicznych zależności aktorów). Ponadto podejście policentryczne daje większe możliwości interpretacji i klasyfikowania relacji międzyinstytucjonalnych.

Słowa kluczowe: policentryzm, *multi-level governance*, teoria, miejskie obszary funkcjonalne, Polska.