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**THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY  
IN REGIONAL STUDIES:  
THE ROLE OF THE PAST IN POLISH REGIONAL  
SOCIOLOGY AFTER 1989\***

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Contemporary regional studies are characterized by an approach focused on the issue yet prepared to broaden the aspects of the phenomena under investigation and combine different means of analysis. This leads to usage of the accomplishments of other disciplines, with history playing a particularly large role among them. The growing significance of the global context is encouraging the perception of social phenomena not only within a specific space, but also within a specific point of the historic process.

Studies into regional development are evolving in the direction of holistic depictions, taking into account cultural factors and the symbolic plane. The new theoreticians of regionalism, embedded in a critical and constructivist trend, emphasize that regions cannot be treated as something obvious, natural and objective. They tend rather to take the character of processes, and are constantly undergoing construction in the symbolic sphere.<sup>1</sup> In this view, the past may be a subject of research as a key cultural resource. The top-down activity of the authorities encounters grassroots activity, and different ways of understanding regional identity confront one another. This may be viewed as a process of mutual negotiation and the agreeing upon of institutionalized discursive practices, which are expressed in the regional policies put into effect.<sup>2</sup>

The subject of my analysis is the output of sociological regional studies in Poland. In monitoring how they have evolved over the past three decades, I wish to draw attention to the distinct presence of the past in the interpretations they present; it seems to fulfil crucial functions in them. The main question concerns the applications and ways of evoking and analysing the past in sociological discourse. I am interested in the way in which researchers employ the past. Does it even constitute a topic of research in the said analyses, or is it rather something just used instrumentally? What tasks does it fulfil, what theses does it serve? What events and phenomena of the past appear the most often? Does the sociologists'

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<sup>1</sup> Soderbaum, Shaw (2003).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Paasi (2013).

usage of the past have any touchpoints with the research practice of historians? Is there evolution in how and why the history of Poland's regions is drawn upon? I intend to answer these questions in two areas of sociological studies into the regions. The first is determined by analyses connected to regional development. And the second is the trend of regional identity studies, and particularly their enduring cultural components such as local traditions.

The level of interest in the past seems to have been growing for a dozen or so years in Polish social analyses. At the beginning of the transformations, attention was turned to the future and focused on the anticipated effect of the changes. The thinking was prospective, with an image of accelerated modernization modelled on the West and taking a kind of compressed timescale. Sociologists' analyses frequently involved comparisons between the current condition and the planned outcome of the transformations. In this rather technocratic approach, the past as such rarely appeared, and then solely in the context of hindrances and obstacles, situated within Poles' post-socialist mental deficits. Society was perceived as the area of reality resisting transformation, and was a source of difficulties in realizing the intended modernization project.

It was only the prospect of European integration that induced people to discern a more distant historical horizon, reaching back beyond the period of the partitions right to the moment when Eastern and Western Europe set out on different paths of development in the sixteenth century. They recalled the historical economic backwardness, the delayed processes of modernization, the weak industrialization, the detrimental effects of not having a state, and the non-modern social structure. Eastern Europe, hitherto defined mainly through its experience of communism, faced the necessity of comparing itself with the rest of the world and defining itself within the European project. It is worth recalling a remark by Anna Sosnowska, who noticed back in 1997 that attitude towards the country's peripheral location had become an important source of political differences.<sup>3</sup> Today the problem of peripherality is recognized as one of the fundamental issues behind the divisions in Polish public space, and determines how one thinks about the regions. This perspective entails the need for thinking in terms of history.

Regional politics and regionalism also entered a new stage in the period of transformation. Beforehand, the socialist centralization and policy of levelling out developmental differences tended rather to blur the factors responsible for spatial differences. Regionalism, as the representation of particular group interests, was perceived as a threat to the overriding goals of the state and the advocated idea of unity.<sup>4</sup> Collapse of the centrally planned economy revealed existing regional differences, while Poland's opening up to the influence of global developments greatly reinforced the significance of spatial differentiation. Regional competitive advantages began to count when considering developmental opportunities. Finally, the political liberalization and development of democratic mechanisms at all levels, including local, created new possibilities for forming policy and building up local institutions and local identities. At a later point, European integration contributed significantly to the phenomenon of the formation of regions, equipping them

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<sup>3</sup> Sosnowska (1997).

<sup>4</sup> Gorzelak (1993): 47.

with real resources and significantly reinforcing them. A new set of research issues came to light, such as regional local government and management, a new regional policy, territorial integration, and the building up of regional identity and regional memory.

## II. REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND HISTORICAL DIFFERENCES

As research began into regional development, so too questions appeared regarding the factors determining regional differentiation and chances of overcoming obstacles to development. The question of Poland's place in the new European order reminded one of the endurance and topicality of historical differences in development. Jenő Szűcs' idea of a division into 'three Europes'<sup>5</sup> found a voice in public debate in Poland, and there was a return to the earlier deliberations by Oskar Halecki regarding the different parts of our continent.<sup>6</sup> Discussion began on the new meaning of the category of Central and Eastern Europe, which was part of a broader debate involving writers, intellectuals and dissidents. They opposed the then prevalent identification of this area with the Soviet Union, and before that Russia, while also seeking a new way of situating Poland within Europe.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time the preparations for reforming the country's territorial organization livened up the debate on regional divisions within Poland. In 1996 Bohdan Jałowicki posed a number of questions which long defined the scope of research issues in regional studies. They concerned how far one should reach back into the past to explain contemporary differences, what the differences involved and their scope, what share cultural and social factors had in the regions' development, and which regions had greater and which lesser chances for developing. In regard to the new regional social movements he asked about their basis: whether enduring, a result of a feeling of territorial identity, or perhaps brought to life solely in *ad hoc* ideology?<sup>8</sup> In sketching the outline of historical references in studies into the regions, he recognized that essentially two historical periods contributed to the current shape of the economic processes in the regions: the period from before the partitions, responsible for the enduring division into western and eastern parts of the country, and the period of industrialization from the second half of the nineteenth century, of key importance for today's economic map of Poland. In his studies into the spatial differentiation of Poland, he adopted the division into four historical macro-regions: Congress Poland, Wielkopolska, Galicia, and the Western Territories, each of which developed specific economic structures and infrastructure. However, the history of the partitions is also applied for explaining social attitudes and behaviours, as well as voters' political profiles.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Szűcs (1995).

<sup>6</sup> Halecki (1994).

<sup>7</sup> Kundera (1984); Miłosz (1990). More regarding the course of the debate: Sosnowska (2004): 134–146.

<sup>8</sup> Jałowicki (1996a): 5.

<sup>9</sup> Jałowicki (1996b): 36–37.

Likewise, the quality of commune management and the efficiency of local government is compared to differences resulting from the borders of the partitions.<sup>10</sup> In these cases it is more difficult to justify how the non-material, purely cultural differences were transplanted and became entrenched. The predominant schema is that of the historical process of adopting capitalistic patterns of economic activity proceeding gradually in an eastern direction, meaning that regions located further west are not only better equipped and more affluent, but also have attitudes and personalities of a different type, more suited to the challenges of the market economy.<sup>11</sup> Regional differences in the level of economic development are usually tied to historical data regarding indices of urbanization, the percentages of the population in trade and the crafts, the efficiency of agricultural production or progress in industrialization.<sup>12</sup> Particular significance is attributed to the nineteenth century as the era of industrial revolution and the emergence of nation states, along with the accompanying growth in the network of modern institutions. These motors of the great changes of modernization are treated as phenomena that were formative for today's developmental distances. They are most often viewed as deterministic, assuming that 'changing them would demand a rewinding of history, which is impossible'.<sup>13</sup> This irremovable burden of the past is portrayed as a trap of backwardness and a source of problems that are practically insurmountable. The widely-held vision of Polish history – in which the different path taken for economic transformation than in Western Europe, and later the loss of statehood and delayed industrialization in the late nineteenth century, are the main points on the trajectory of economic backwardness – is applied in studies into contemporary regional development.

This perspective dominates in the estimating of regional developmental potential. The past is also used in studies into the regional public sphere and Poles' political activeness. A couple of years after its rebirth, geographical rules were observed in voting behaviour and political profiles. Tomasz Zarycki recognized that they coincided with the divisions of the partitions. The areas of the so-called Western and Northern Territories constitute a fourth region, with its own, separate profile.<sup>14</sup> He acknowledged that the partitions' different histories were responsible for today's differences. Further justification for this thesis can be found in research by Jerzy Bartkowski into the impact of tradition on voting behaviour and social attitudes.<sup>15</sup> In order to take into account the presence of elements from the past in today's culture of local communities, he applied Kazimierz Dobrowolski's theory of historical basis. He regarded the turn of the twentieth century as a period of not only economic modernization for Polish territories, but also their social modernization, proceeding differently in the three partitional contexts. Bartkowski analysed the specificity of the patterns of collective activity shaped in the late nineteenth century in each of the macro-regions, and investigated regional differentiation in electoral behaviour and political preferences. He based his multi-

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. Gorzelak (2016); Smętkowski, Płoszaj (2016).

<sup>11</sup> Hryniewicz (1996); Gorzelak, Tucholska (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Hryniewicz (1996); cf. Hryniewicz (2015).

<sup>13</sup> Zarycki (1999): 99.

<sup>14</sup> Zarycki (2002).

<sup>15</sup> Bartkowski (2003).

faceted and thorough analysis, embracing a period from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the modern day, not only on the available historical reports, but also on accounts from the period and the fine literature of the day.

Both Zarycki and Bartkowski proposed a contextual depiction, according to which the individual's cultural surroundings influence how sense is given to actions, and thereby modify manners of conduct. Many component parts of this context are situated in tradition. This means that they derive from the past, while enduring in a fundamentally unchanged form for over a century, and today too they shape the attitudes and actions of successive generations. Both researchers compared the four historical macro-regions, but their goal was not to mark out the complete trajectories of social processes; they selected only key moments from the past, focusing on the end of the nineteenth century. Such an approach is quite common in research studies into regional differences. Also in international comparative studies of post-communist Europe the impact of different histories on the process of the institutional formation of regions was taken into account in a similar way. The framework for the analyses comprised three mega-regions of post-communist Europe deriving from different paths of historical development: eastern, western and southern. In this depiction, not only the institutions but also regional identities are determined by the legacy of the past.<sup>16</sup> This schema is simple and stereotypical, and has no room for in-depth historical analyses.

The past determines the present in these studies. But this connection is restricted to indicating factors shaping social mechanisms, for example towards the close of the nineteenth century, and to recognizing them as significant for current differences, most often mental. The mechanisms by which past forms influence people's attitudes and conduct today remain unclear. Researchers are not constructing roads along which institutions or events from a specific point in the past 'transferred' their influence through the decades of other events and processes right up to the present day. Although it is easier to discern such connections in the case of the material economic potential, the development of infrastructure or institutional achievements, the influence of a specific past on subjective cultural phenomena is not explained.

### III. REGIONAL IDENTITIES AS CONSTRUCTS BUILT UP AROUND THE PAST

With the development of regional policy and the growing achievements of local governments, the issue of regional identity ceased to be solely a topic of sociological diagnoses,<sup>17</sup> and started to be the subject of ideological projects. Treated as

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<sup>16</sup> Tatur (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Polish sociology has produced a broad range of works on regional identity; cf. Starosta (1999). They accentuate the subjective aspect of identification, largely comprising a cultural context – including historical (Rybicki 1979). For example the past for Stanisław Ossowski was an essential element in his description of regional bond in Opole Silesia, or in the historically varying relationship between private and ideological homeland (Ossowski 1967). Likewise Antonina Kłoskowska, analysing identification with nations and their aspects, such as conversion, borderlands, and the situations of ethnic minorities, sets the cases investigated in a historical context (Kłoskowska, 1996).

local capital, identities became the objects of construction, adaptation and utilization by leaders in diverse contexts. In treating culture as a kind of resource that can serve the realization of group goals or social mobilization, local elites see in it an instrument of management. Local identities and bonds may be reinforced and directed by narratives of the past. This has proved important, especially as Bohdan Jałowiecki and Marek S. Szczepański determined in 2000 that the regional identity of Poles was 'weak and blurred', and that such identification was only verbal in character.<sup>18</sup> As such, in the first years after the reform of local government we were dealing with an 'identity-related intensification', involving the constructing of top-down projects creating regional ideologies and images of local communities based on history interpreted anew. An important aspect of this trend was the increase in significance of ethnic identities. The rebirth of such identification post 1989 was conducive for the constructing of regional distinctness, and even a social movement. Sociologists conducting research into Kashubian and Silesian identity are reconstructing these regions' histories in detail.<sup>19</sup> A sociological analysis of the formation of identity in Silesia or Kashubia cannot be carried out without an in-depth interpretation of the regions' past, both that experienced by individuals, and that constituting its shared version. It is part of their identification of today, but is also a building block of the public discourse about them.<sup>20</sup>

Regions with a problematic and complex identity, facing the task of its reconstruction, drew particular interest. Such was the case with the Western Territories, which following the severing of social and cultural continuity underwent significant change and required a new identity policy. The latest analyses of the process of regional identity forming among the residents of Warmia-Mazury show a decades-long process of institutionalization and other cultural mechanisms shaping the new region. Reconstructing and modelling the past became their trademark. After the rejection of the narrative adopted during the Polish People's Republic, of auspicious and rapid integration, an image was adopted of a complex and long-lasting process in the emergence of the regions of the Western Territories. Wojciech Łukowski set his typology of the region's inhabitants' identification in the formational events from the end of World War II, through the period of the People's Republic of Poland, right up to the political transformation and approaching accession to the European Union.<sup>21</sup> Jacek Poniedziałek engaged his historical knowledge even further. Making use of historians' papers, the findings of sociological research from the years of the People's Republic, and the resource of biographical materials gathered over the years, he constructed the trajectories of successive stages in the process of the region's emergence. In this depiction, the past does not constitute a restriction to contemporary activeness. In fact, it is precisely by analysing the past that one can grasp the subjectivity of the residents of Warmia-Mazury, laboriously generating their new identifications. It is worth noting that here we have an interweaving of grassroots, spontaneous

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<sup>18</sup> Jałowiecki, Szczepański (2001): 195.

<sup>19</sup> E.g.: Synak (1998); Nijakowski (2002); Szczepański, Śliz (2018).

<sup>20</sup> An extensive historical analysis is contained for example in Lech Nijakowski's work on Silesian identity (Nijakowski 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Łukowski (2002).

identities built up over successive decades with ideological projects promoted by the regional elites.

In his work on the creation of Małopolska regional subjectivity, Andrzej Bukowski likewise distinguished two paths in the formation of identity.<sup>22</sup> In both, the past proved an important area in the creating of regional identity: in the first as the subject of management, and in the second as the place of experiencing the inhabitants' identification with the region.

Studies into regional identities also come in the form of comparisons between areas contrasting in how advanced their processes of modernization are. Comparison between the western and eastern borderlands is based on an image of cultural diffusion. While adopting the assumption that the political transformation awoke dormant determinants of individual and collective behaviour, Irena Machaj inquired into the cultural causes of the slower pace of social and economic transformation in the eastern regions of the country.<sup>23</sup> The sources of these differences were situated in the past. The severance of historical continuity in 1945 was treated as a factor of effective change and a chance for modern, entrepreneurial attitudes. In the author's opinion, in the east of the country cultural continuity generates strong communities unprepared for the challenges of the modern day due to being anchored in cultural legacy and their orientation towards preserving it. In the western borderlands, the emergence of attitudes of openness to change, adaptation to otherness, and pragmatism was linked to the effects of wartime displacement and the necessity to cope in the new social environment. The experiencing of broken continuity created there a type of identity open to otherness and working together, and geared for social advancement. As such, one of its features is the emergence from beneath the burden of tradition. Breaking with the past transformed the inhabitants of the Western Territories into modern Europeans.

A region's image is an asset when rivalling for recognition and prestige, which is reflected in its position in political battles or when competing for economic resources. As such, the image generated by the researchers, of a modern region rejecting the burden of tradition and adapting well to contemporary challenges, may support its position and help in its play for recognition. Over a decade ago Zarycki drew attention to the political character of interpretation of Poland's most recent history and the partitions in the context of regional development. The contrasting images of the legacy of two regions, Galicia and the Western and Northern Territories, different depending on political convictions, were characteristic. For the right-wing, conservative camp, Galicia symbolizes traditional values while the Western Territories represent modernity and a liberal and left-wing version of an orientation for change.<sup>24</sup>

The myths of multiculturalism that today evoke positive connotations are a frequently used image-forming tool that cannot be constructed without taking the distant past into account. This is so in regard to the promotion of Gdańsk or Wrocław, but also Lublin and Białystok. In sociological studies into city identities, the inclusion of a description of history, frequently constituting a voluminous 'city

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<sup>22</sup> Bukowski (2011): 191.

<sup>23</sup> Machaj (2005): 88.

<sup>24</sup> Zarycki (2007).

biography', is considered obvious.<sup>25</sup> It provides material for reconstructing the narrative regarding the city or the image-related games in play. The past is also a resource thanks to which contemporary urban space is interpreted and given value.

Taking Warmia-Mazury as an example, Jacek Poniedziałek showed how a region's territorial shape was translated into the language of myth. Traditions are devised using the available resources, among which the past plays a key role. The version of history adopted by the collective fulfils numerous functions. It furthers the social and political mobilization of the residents, facilitates their integration.<sup>26</sup> Such practices have become the subject of critical analyses revealing their legitimizing and persuasive functions. Discursive mechanisms applied in promotional strategies have been seen to be aimed at transforming a region 'into a recognizable product, a brand reconstructing and mythologizing real or imagined cultural attributes of the territory, attributes that can be used in the claim for resources available in the globalized social and economic space'.<sup>27</sup> This process translates culture and tradition, and as such also visions of the past, into an economic and marketing asset.

This symbolic fighting and image rivalry applies in particular to weaker, economically less effective regions struggling with developmental problems. They include Poland's eastern voivodeships. 'Eastness' is an attribute frequently used as a synonym for backwardness, poverty, the inability to develop, and a weak cultural base. These stigmatizing interpretations are also present in academic texts, in which Poland is split into two parts, illustrated in the metaphors of 'tiger Poland' and 'gopher Poland'.<sup>28</sup> The eastern voivodeships are described as the part of the country where the force of the past and the factors of backwardness are insurmountable. Apart from poorer economic development, sociologists indicate a non-modern character to the patterns of action and attitudes towards reality. The crippling legacy of backwardness and power of traditionalism are given as explaining such attitudes, while contemporary structural determinants and unfavourable, peripheral location are noticed much less often.<sup>29</sup> Sociologists are therefore using visions of the past for appraising the inhabitants of different regions. And since the course of history cannot be changed, it is also far from easy to overcome this kind of stigmatization.

Regional narratives in the east of Poland, and especially the official ones creating an attractive voivodeship image, are striving to overcome this widespread stigmatizing feature. In their promotional activities, attempts towards a reevaluation are being made, and historical matter is also being sourced for this purpose – similarly selectively and where useful, for example by highlighting the region's multicultural past. Such image play is recognized by researchers, who reveal the instrumental approach to history in it.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bierwiazzonek et al. (2017).

<sup>26</sup> Poniedziałek (2011).

<sup>27</sup> Gašior-Niemiec (2004): 21.

<sup>28</sup> Szczepański, Ślęzak-Tazbir (2009): 340–347.

<sup>29</sup> Kolasa-Nowak (2011).

<sup>30</sup> Gašior-Niemiec (2013).



The ideologies of eastness created in our part of Europe became the subject of an extensive study by Zarycki.<sup>31</sup> Their main raw material is the past, which serves to create justifications. He questions the widespread tendency to perceive the problems of Eastern Poland as a natural and obvious consequence of the history of underdevelopment. This applies in particular to the all too easy linking of economic backwardness to a specific type of social behaviour and specific mentality. For Zarycki, the weakness of the empirical substructure of such arbitrary conclusions is an indicator of internal orientalization, also present in academic discourse. He argues that narratives of the past are a part of the discursive strategies that are imposing ideological images of the eastern regions. The past is an object of rivalry and manipulation expressing the symbolic domination of the centre over peripheral areas. In Zarycki's opinion, we are dealing with a process of the centre appropriating descriptions made in the peripheries, meaning the creation of a central version of local histories. At the same time there is a regional practice of compensating for weaker economic or political position by boosting local cultural resources, which very often concern the past. This means that in the eastern regions, local policy – in particular that related to identity and image – draws upon history more often.<sup>32</sup>

The past constitutes important regional capital in terms of image. Its description is frequently a key component in studies researching regional identities. It undergoes repeated reconstruction so as to fulfil various practical functions, to legitimize and to justify, to provide arguments in disputes and rivalry, to build up depictions integrating the community.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

What function today does the past therefore fulfil in regional research studies? In analyses of regional development, references to the past usually serve to emphasize the limited possibility of change – both in institutions and in individual ways of functioning. Dependency on the path taken is recognized as an insurmountable obstacle. The growing acknowledgment of the past seems to be connected to the ever more realistic views of the social transformations in Poland. A vision of the stubborn ballast of the past is used to explain the lasting disproportions coming to light in regard to Poland's potential compared to the West.

Economic history seems to substantiate the lastingness of differences in regions' development and their different potential for the future. The model of cultural diffusion applied most often corresponds to the vision of the process of modernization as westernisation. Developmental prospects are connected to the geographical proximity of adoption of western patterns. History, usually in the form of the moment when the European economy split in the sixteenth century or the collapse of Polish statehood in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is interpreted as defining the changes of contemporary development. This is a rather deterministic view of the role of the past, both in regard to economic and political structures and institutions on the one hand, and the inheriting of attitudes and mentality on the other. Such a perspective rather limits the possibilities of

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<sup>31</sup> Zarycki (2014).

<sup>32</sup> Zarycki (2005).

overcoming the historical burden of backwardness and the achieving change. In this depiction, people have little enfranchisement, while the regional variation seems quite enduring. The past in these analyses is usually a resource of fixed historical knowledge, a resource drawn on by sociologists to connect two points in time: a chosen moment from the past and the situation today. They tend not to focus on a detailed recreation of the path that was necessary for a past factor to maintain its influence to this day. Whereas such a shortcut may be considered justified in relation to recent eras, directly linking the reach of Cistercian institutions in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, for example, with today's map of regional economic activeness does not seem particularly convincing.<sup>33</sup>

In studies into regional identities, significantly more space and attention is devoted to the past. It is analysed as an area where social reality is created. A focus on specific events and a description of the specific paths taken by the transformations reveals people's formative contribution to regional processes. A good example is the narrative of the Western Territories, in which sociological studies have been broadened to cover the entire post-war period. As a result one can show the process by which the initial existing circumstances were converted into the inhabitants' actions and interactions, while today's effects of the formation of the regions are a consequence of active adaptation and the resultant of numerous factors spread out in time. Here sociologists are not only making use of the findings of historians, but are themselves also creating knowledge of the past, investigating historical sources and analysing the biographical narratives of the settlers. The past is being reconstructed as a complex process of transformations in which every subsequent step holds significance. It is drawn upon so as to sketch a unique path leading to the modern day, but less often so as to assess whether it blocked or facilitated opportunities for development.

The resources of the past are the main building blocks of regional identities, a tool for integration and regional marketing. History therefore appears as an important component in local policies and regional discourses. Sociologists are also diagnosing these mechanisms, researching how the past takes the role of a tool in cultural play and in rivalry for a region's better image. They deconstruct the ways in which it is used pragmatically and instrumentally. Their critical analyses also deal with academic texts.

Looking at the eras of history, the domination of the nineteenth century is no surprise since it was a period of key importance for the emergence of modern states and industry. The split into the partitions is the most important point of reference. However, the inclusion of new territories after World War II, and the history of the Western Territories, are the main reasons for referring to the most recent history.

On the whole, regional sociological studies draw from the resource of facts and interpretations set by historians. They tend not to enrich knowledge of the past, and few of them are interdisciplinary projects. However, the general conviction about the key role that the past has for understanding regions' attributes is starting to assume the shape of specific questions regarding the mechanisms of transmission over time. I believe that recent years have seen growth in the level of interest in the past in regional sociology. Evolution here is moving in the direction of detailed historical questions as a necessary component of clarifications and essential when conducting one's own source-based research of historical matter. One has to agree with Robert Traba that studies into localness are particular promising ground for the growth of interdisciplinary

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<sup>33</sup> Zdun (2018): 123–134.

research ventures. The investigation of local trajectories in the changes is enabling the grasp – within a small fragment – of numerous complex dependencies between economic, political and cultural factors.<sup>34</sup>

An example of a topic that is unfolding in an interesting manner in this direction is that of regional differentiation in educational achievements.<sup>35</sup> The spread of school exam results has for some time indicated a steady tendency in which researchers discern the consequences of the partitional divisions. This refers to finding mechanisms that have perpetuated these factors for over a century, ensuring them with their current vitality and influence. With this aim, the sociological agenda has been enhanced with historical analysis of the emergence of school systems in Polish territories under the partitions, school accessibility, and the partitioning powers' school policy. Differences have also been described in the social status of the school, and the different social norms in regard to education in each of the partitioned territories, revealing a fundamental advantage for Galicia in the degree of social acceptance for the school and the position of teacher. This was accompanied by a positive attitude towards school and education, which was provided in the Polish language and in conditions of ethnic autonomy. In addition, education became a trampoline for social advancement within the Austrian partition more than in the other partitioned lands.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the higher exam results today in the area that was formerly Galicia are explained by the intergenerational transmission of the educational effort.

The partitional divisions may fulfil the role of a unique laboratory. Other cultural attributes are also explained in this manner, for example differences in the intensity of religious practices or the popularity of democratic attitudes, which became embedded thanks to different intergenerational communication in each of the partitions.<sup>37</sup>

The conclusions may be generalized for the issues of the modernization of societies, showing the course of interaction between different types of public institution over a long stretch of time. Such historical analyses grasp quite accurately the relations between type of institutional infrastructure and changes in people's motivations and actions. The detailed trajectories of the fortunes of regional communities also allow one to reveal the agency of different entities. These examples of new regional analyses show that if the past becomes a real subject of research, the findings have a chance of going beyond a narrow and value-placing interpretation of the past, oscillating between images of its irremovable burden or the valuable legacy of history.

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<sup>34</sup> Traba (2009): 238–239.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Herbst, Rivikin (2013); Herbst Kaliszewska (2017); Bukowski (2018).

<sup>36</sup> Herbst, Kaliszewska; Bukowski (2018).

<sup>37</sup> Grosfeld, Zhuravskaya 2017.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY IN REGIONAL STUDIES:  
THE ROLE OF THE PAST IN POLISH REGIONAL SOCIOLOGY AFTER 1989

S u m m a r y

Historical explanations play an important and growing role in regional studies conducted within the framework of Polish sociology. The aim of the article is to assess the scope of the uses of history and to analyse the ways of using it. I attempt to answer the following questions: what is the purpose of using the past in regional studies? What events and phenomena from the past are present in regional analyses? Is there critical reflection on how to use the past? Two areas of regional studies have been distinguished. The first is determined by analyses related to the economic dimension of regional development. The most important issues concern historical backwardness and the problem of the peripheral condition of Polish regions. The second is the study of local identities and local traditions. The past is an important component of local policies and regional discourses. There is growing critical reflection on the use of the past in managing the image of the region and creating new regional identities. References to the past serve various purposes: they justify deterministic visions and describe the durability of regional differences. They are important resources in symbolic games and the foundations of local identities. Recently, there have been new analyses in which the regional past is the subject of sociological and historical research. They search for mechanisms that connect historical institutions and practices with contemporary attitudes and actions.

Keywords: Polish regional sociology; regional past; historical sociology