

Summary of the doctoral dissertation titled 'Expanding the boundaries of cities with county rights in Poland from 2002 to 2018'

The considerations presented in this work represent an attempt at a comprehensive analysis of the issues related to the processes of expanding the boundaries of cities with county rights in Poland that occurred between 2002 and 2018. The research focused on the legally regulated procedure for changes in municipal boundaries as established in the Act on Municipal Self-Government, targeting a specific type of local government unit known as a city with county rights, and a particular form of change related to boundary expansion. The category of city with county rights emerged in the structure of local self-government in Poland as a consequence of the political system reform initiated in 1999. It represents a hybrid unit: a municipality with the status of a city that also performs the tasks of a county. Currently, there are 66 cities with county rights in Poland. Generally, these are the largest Polish cities, which also serve as local and regional centres of social, economic, and cultural life. Between 2002 and 2018, the boundaries of 20 cities with county rights were modified, with boundary expansions implemented in 17 of these cases.

The aim of this dissertation was to present the course of changes in the territorial division of Poland with reference to cities with county rights between 2002 and 2018, their characteristics, and to identify the ways in which the boundaries of these cities were expanded. To achieve the research objective, the following research problem was formulated: what conditions and factors influenced the expansion of the boundaries of cities with county rights in Poland from 2002 to 2018, how did these processes unfold, and what were the effects of the boundary changes?

In-depth research was conducted in three cities: Rzeszów, Opole, and Zielona Góra. These cities expanded their boundaries between 2002 and 2018, incorporating the largest areas. However, each case was executed through different procedures and under varying circumstances. Rzeszów and Opole expanded their boundaries through the incorporation of neighbouring villages or parts of them. In Rzeszów, the boundary changes occurred in several stages, while in Opole, the integration of suburban areas was accomplished through a single procedure. Zielona Góra, on the other hand, represents a unique case of boundary expansion through the amalgamation of the city with an entirely adjoining municipality.

The theoretical foundations of the dissertation were based on new institutionalism. The work also referenced the concept of urban governance. In the conducted research, the author employed several research methods and techniques, including multiple case study method, comparative method, institutional-legal method, desk research, and in-depth individual interviews.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, six chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, a list of tables and maps, as well as three appendices. The first chapter is theoretical and focuses on the theoretical foundations of the research. Based on the relevant literature, the author presents the assumptions of new institutionalism and conducts a comprehensive analysis of the various currents operating within this framework. In the second part of the chapter, attention is directed to the essence of the governance concept, with particular attention to its development concerning urban areas, namely urban governance.

In the second chapter, a characterization of cities with county rights is presented, along with a detailed description of the formal-legal procedure for changing the administrative boundaries of municipalities, based on the applicable legal provisions and relevant literature. The second part of this chapter discusses all changes to the boundaries of cities with county rights that were implemented between 2002 and 2018.

The third chapter has a methodological character. It presents a detailed description and characterization of the research process that was carried out. This section defines the researched procedure for expanding the boundaries of cities with county rights based on accepted theoretical assumptions. The chapter also includes information regarding the organization of the research and its course. It concludes with a preliminary characterization of the cities selected for in-depth studies.

In chapters four to six, the author presents the results of empirical research organized into structures corresponding to the three identified stages of the researched procedure. Chapter four is dedicated to the analysis of the factors and circumstances that preceded the formal initiation of the examined procedures. In this section, the work identifies the individuals and groups that played a role as initiators of the boundary change processes, along with their accompanying motivations, proposed directions for boundary modifications, and actions taken prior to the formal commencement of the actual procedures for expanding the boundaries of cities with county rights.

The fifth chapter discusses the issues comprising the procedure's course from its formal initiation to the moment the boundary changes came into effect, with a particular focus on the roles played by individual participants in this process.

The sixth chapter focuses on the consequences of the implemented boundary changes for cities with county rights. Four types of effects are presented: political, economic, spatial, and social. These issues are considered not only in relation to the cities but also in the context of the municipalities whose boundaries were reduced as a result of the examined procedures. The summary of this chapter also addresses the issue of beneficiaries of the implemented boundary changes.

The conclusion of this dissertation provides a summary of the research conducted. It presents synthesized answers to the research questions posed in the work and verifies the research hypotheses.

Keywords: city with county rights, boundary expansion, local government