The strategic-relational formation of regional and metropolitan scales: studying two Polish regions undergoing transformation

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ABSTRACT
This paper aims to capture a given spatio-temporal fix in the regional and metropolitan formation processes within two Polish regions: Lubelskie and Silesia. The strategic-relational approach (SRA) to the state analysis was adopted to discern the key elements of regional and metropolitan discourses. The wide SRA framework allows us to situate these discourses within formal and substantive dimensions of both scales, and then – using the territory-place-scale-networks (TPSN) framework – to connect them to the other aspects of socio-spatial relations. The selected regions occupy a special place within regional policy in Poland and discourse at a national level due to structural problems within their territories. Therefore, different actors have identified the need for thorough regional transformations. In turn, they should be analysed in the context of the state transformation, which began in Poland in 1989, with its currently unknown direction when it comes to the modes of regional and metropolitan policies. The results of the research prove that specific actors adopt regionally different strategies, aiming at pursuing their own goals as well as supporting regional raison d’êts. At the same time, however, it is difficult to indicate evidence of political rescaling concerning the transfer of tasks and resources to the regional scale, except for its strengthening resulting from the implementation of European Union funds, which can be considered in terms of governance or meta-governance failure. The ‘stewards of hope’ image has been assigned in this context to new metropolitan-scale institutions.

INTRODUCTION
A significant part of the research on the processes and relations within regional and metropolitan spaces has been embedded for years in the context of spatial construction and the transformation of state power (Brenner, 2004; 2009). As part of this discourse, Gualini and Fricke (2019), Hodson and Marvin (2017) and Olesen and Hansen (2020) refer in their recent studies to the governance question, analysing the practices of public and private actors, as well as
the driving forces of specific public policies. D’Albergo and Lefèvre (2018), Fricke and Gualini (2018) and Nelles et al. (2018) direct their attention towards place-specific circumstances (i.e., governance networks and discourses) that shape metropolitan spaces. In an earlier study, Cochrane (2012) highlighted the importance of territory as something actively formed and shaped in English regionalism. Deas and Lord (2006) had used Brenner’s arguments to describe European spatial planning and new regionalism discourse-driven processes of creating new regional spaces within the European territory. Other interpretative frameworks concerning region-building processes – referring to actor–network theory – have been provided by Metzger (2013), Paasi (2010) and also Paasi and Metzger (2017). These authors (Paasi & Metzger, 2017) consider it relevant, in the context of studying regions as social constructs, to ask questions about who or what is ascribing regionality to an entity, concerning not only policymakers or residents but also academic researchers. Importantly, we should bear in mind that it has become increasingly difficult to separate the processes taking place in urban systems from a wider regional context (Soja, 2015).

Jonas and Moisio (2018) have been analysing the ongoing areas of research and indicate the fundamental future directions of city-regionalism studies. They argue that, so far, little attention has been paid to the political and social structure of city-regions in the context of interests and strategies implemented at the state level. Among the questions that frame a broad research perspective in the above context, Jonas and Moisio (2018) include those questions concerning the role of city regionalism in addressing key national political, policy and administrative problems, as well as delivering (at the city–regional level) strategic investments in social and physical infrastructure. The construct of spatial imaginaries (regional, metropolitan or city-regional), in turn, has been widely used to follow rescaling politics and new scalar configurations within different geographical spaces (Davoudi & Brooks, 2021; Pham, 2020; Wachsmuth & Kilfoil, 2021; Valler et al., 2021).

The theoretical framework that allows one to refer to each of the topics outlined above has been the strategic–relational approach (SRA), with the territory–place–scale–network (TPSN) analytical model at its centre. This analytical tool places institutions at the centre of its interests and it focuses primarily on the state and state power (Jessop, 1982, 2001, 2007, 2013, 2016b). Jessop conceptualizes this approach by describing dimensions of the state (understood as a social relation) and connecting them to the aspects of socio-spatiality. However, as he proves, one should treat SRA also as a tool to explore relations of power within regional, urban and local contexts (Jessop, 1997, 2001, 2016b). Thus, one can define a region or metropolitan area as a social relation and explore policies as well as politics that exist within them and affect them (Lagendijk, 2007).

In this context, relations and the way they are perceived by actors who shape discourses in some Polish regions and metropolitan areas constitute valuable material to investigate. This is due to several reasons. First, the concept of region was supposed to be a meaningful tool for the authors of the political reforms in Poland after 1989 to carry out ‘immense and uncompromising restructuring of the state, market, and society, constituting a conditio sine qua non to integrate Poland into the rich structure of diverse European systems’ (Kukliński, 1990, p. 5; see also Swianiewicz, 2013; the reforms introduced from the early 1990s in other CEE countries had a similar genesis – Campbell & Coulson, 2006; Dyba et al., 2018). In the early 2000s, their role was bolstered by leading involvement in the implementation of EU-led programmes. Simultaneously, their position within the national polity has been relatively weak, notably due to a lack of financial resources. Consequently, it has been difficult to create, and especially to implement political and economic agendas within the regions. The elements of regional construct often remain invisible or unclear.

Second, the last decade has been a time of unprecedented institutional change in the implementation of public policies at the metropolitan scale. It has also been a period when
regional policy has become one of the main policies of the state (Żuber, 2019). Its directions, considering, in particular, the model of redistribution of funds between metropolitan centres and other areas of the country, became one of the relevant arguments in the dispute in public discourse. Third, recent years have been marked by the process of consolidating the authoritarian statism within the central government in Poland, which, as one can assume, influences power relations within local and regional settings.

Finally, it seems to be difficult to find studies using SRA and TPSN to capture the dynamics of changes on the regional and metropolitan scene in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This article, partially at least, fills this research gap.

This paper aims to determine what dimensions of regional and metropolitan relations have been discerned by selected actors in two Polish regions. This will allow for the capturing of a given spatio-temporal fix in the regional and metropolitan formation processes. The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The next section discusses the main assumptions of SRA, as well as TPSN, and highlights the most significant assumptions of the debate around this framework in the context of the subject of this paper. The methods are then described, and the regions selected for the case studies are characterized. This is followed by a presentation of the analysis results. The paper ends with a discussion and summary with recommendations for further research. The metropolitan and regional spaces are understood in this paper as discursively constructed spatial categories (Fricke & Gualini, 2018).

STATE (REGION/METROPOLITAN AREA) AS A SOCIAL RELATION

As indicated above, the main premise of the approach developed by Jessop was to depict the transformation of structures, purposes and relations of and within the capitalist state. Nevertheless, Jessop has focused not only on the consequences of class, capital or ideology domination for entire state systems, but also on cities and supranational blocs (Jessop, 1982, 1990, 2004, 2008, 2016b). SRA allowed one to critically reflect on institutional turns in social science by placing structure and agency in the field of view, where they are both situated in relation to each other. Structure as well as agency should be then treated as reflexively and recursively connected. In this context, the functioning of institutions should be analysed in their wider systemic perspective, considering their micro-foundations, meso-connections and macro-contexts (Jessop, 2001, 2005, 2008).

Jessop then argues one should not reify the state (or institutions in general) but rather treat it as a sum of often contradictory sets of actions, forces and interests of different actors, that construct spatio-temporal and institutional fixes. SRA demands a detailed insight into the strategies, conditions, (dis)advantages, subjectivities or identities of given actors. All these assets influence the balance of power or shape the relations between different entities. One can name such an attitude as ‘methodological relationism’ – meaning that no social phenomena should be characterized without reference to its social relations (Jessop, 2001, 2016b). Particular interests of specific subjects with their identities should be then analysed, including the multilevel objective–subjective dialectics. When it comes, in turn, to the state capacities, one should pay particular attention to the ‘spatiotemporal aspects of the structurally inscribed strategic selectivities of a given state system’ (Jessop, 2016b, p. 123).

SRA can be used as a tool for describing the processes of regional and metropolitan scales formation. Thus, their construction has been the result of transformations in the ways of functioning of the state, capital and actors that occur simultaneously in various spatial systems (Gualini & Fricke, 2019; Lagendijk, 2007; Sum, 2004). Following this argument, Gualini and Fricke (2019) analyse economic development policies in the Berlin–Brandenburg metropolitan region in the context of rescaling practices, and define rescaling as a strategic–relational construct that allows one to thoroughly investigate the relations of power between economic...
policy actors and their interests. In terms of research methodology, SRA has been part of the cultural turn, where special attention is paid to semiosis, language and discourse. They are the vehicles for shaping strategies and political imaginaries. Due to specific frames and assumptions, existing ideas can circulate and materialize (Jessop, 2010, 2016b; Knops, 2015).

The central element to SRA has been the territory–place–scale–network (TPSN) framework for the analysis of socio-spatial relations (Jessop et al., 2008). It supports the multi-threaded and multidimensional analysis of spatio-temporal and institutional fixes. The TPSN framework was used by, for example, Gailing et al. (2020) to unveil different patterns of energy transitions in four German regions and by Beveridge et al. (2017) to reframe the debate surrounding water politics and water reuse. TPSN has aimed to spatialize the assumptions of SRA by taking into account the four structuring principles of socio-spatial relations and their combinations in any given circumstances. This procedure intends to open the interpretation fields that appear at the intersections between these principles, without assuming a priori which of them will turn out to be more relevant for the research outcomes. Each of these principles (territory, place, scale, network), associated with their basis of socio-spatial structuration, socio-spatial configurations, contradictions and dilemmas, refer to the central spatial turns within social sciences that have occurred since the 1980s (Harrison, 2013; Jessop et al., 2008; Jones & Jessop, 2010).

The construction of the TPSN framework aptly illustrates the ideas characteristic of contemporary regional studies concerning the call to read of region and territory from different philosophical, conceptual and methodological approaches (Paasi et al., 2018). However, while agreeing with many arguments of Jessop et al. (2008), Paasi (2008) caveats against any pitfalls that could result from the manner in which the framework was constructed. These are, amongst others, the omission of local contexts of the categories central to the model, and potential limitations for the development of other notions relevant for the understanding of various regional worlds. This author also rightly points out that Jessop et al. (2008) did not leave methodological guidance on how to study socio-spatial relations applying TPSN-based directions.

In this article, an attempt will be made to reconstruct, in detail, the dimensions of the region and metropolitan area identified by different actors in two selected Polish regions, and then – another attempt to assess how these conclusions can be related to other SRA elements indicated by Jessop. The reference point in this case will be the modified comparison of different dimensions of the state compiled by Jessop (2016b, p. 58) (Table 1). The former category (modes of representation, modes of articulation, modes of intervention) refers to institutional means of implementing public tasks at the regional and metropolitan level. The latter (social basis, regional/metropolitan project, vision of the region/metropolitan area), in turn, relates to discourses and strategic choices made by actors within power relations studied by the author. The purpose of such reasoning is to highlight the potential of spatialization of these dimensions, and then to allow the verification of the applicability of the TPSN. The embedding of the TPSN framework in the wider context of SRA may be, in part, a response to the constraints that characterize this schema (Gailing et al., 2020; Paasi, 2008).

**METHODOLOGY AND REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

To attain the main goal of the paper, the case study method was used. In the course of the work undertaken, field research was carried out, during which 68 in-depth interviews (individual, in the vast majority of cases) were conducted between July 2019 and December 2020. They were conducted in various parts of metropolitan areas, as well as outside them. Additionally, the locations of interviews were differentiated in terms of demographic trends and the affluence of residents. The interviews were transcribed, and then their content was described, assigning specific fragments to the following entries: perception of one’s role and organization, state, region, metropolitan area, regional capital, other spatial and sectoral relations. Based on these
descriptions, the dimensions of regions and metropolitan areas were reconstructed. Then, based on the content of Table 3 and the interviews, it was verified to what extent the categories included in the TPSN framework accurately describe the discourses and interdependencies between specific actors in the studied regions. This, in turn, made it possible to characterize the remaining elements of the SRA in specific regional contexts. In addition to the content analysis of these interviews, the content of legal acts and strategic documents was investigated. The desk research method was also used, as well as elements of statistical and text analysis in the media discourse. The inductive methodology was adopted during the field research to reconstruct the imaginaries of regions and metropolitan areas from the meanings assigned to them by specific actors.

Currently, both Lubelskie and Silesia regions, due to structural problems occurring within their territories (including those resulting from the long-term reliance of the economy on the mining sector, as was the case in Silesia, and the agricultural sector – the Lublin region, and many places that have been left behind; Rodríguez-Pose, 2017), occupy a special place in domestic regional policy and discourse at the national level. One of the slogans with which the right-wing Law and Justice Party came to power in 2015 was to level differences in the country’s development and change the regional policy model from ‘polarize and diffuse’ (as proposed by the previous government) to territorial justice. A special emphasis has been placed on helping small and medium-sized towns, as well as areas experiencing a loss of their socio-economic functions, exposed to permanent marginalization. The needs and transformational capacity of public and private actors in the analysed areas are also of central importance nowadays because these are the two regions with the largest allocations of funds under (mostly) EU-funded regional operational programmes for the period 2021–27, and both will benefit from the EU’s Just Transition Fund. At the same time, the Lubelskie and Silesia regions contrast, in terms of economic structure and connections, location in different parts of the country (Figure 1),
institutional capacities, historical background, cultural identities, the nature of spatial systems or modes of governance. However, the selection of these regions was made with full awareness of the modernization and transformation needs in both of these territories (Table 2).1

The scientific discourse on the role and importance of regions within the Central and Eastern European countries has been dominated by issues closely related to the accession of these countries to the EU and the impact of the EU-led policies on the state and regional agendas (e.g., Bachtler & McMaster, 2008; Buzogány & Korkut, 2013; Churski & Perdał, 2016; Gorzelak, 1998; Lackowska-Madurowicz & Świętniewicz, 2013; Smętkowski & Wójcik, 2012). As a matter of principle, these works adopted the institutional perspective, understood in assessing the effects of politics and policies carried out by specific actors. Similarly, the issues of institution building, but also spatial and strategic planning, have been central to the works on socio-spatial relations within metropolitan spaces (e.g., Sýkora & Ourednek, 2007; Zuzińska-Żyśko, 2015; cf. Lackowska & Mikuła, 2018; Patti, 2017). In this paper, the perspective has been reversed. An attempt was made then to assess to what extent the elements of regional and metropolitan constructs have been discerned by actors in Lubelskie and Silesia regions.

As indicated in the introduction, the role of Polish regions in the distribution of EU funds heavily defines their current status within the state structures. Suffice to say that the level of financial resources the regional governments redistribute has, at least, doubled since they embraced the role of being the managing authorities of (mostly) EU-financed regional operational programmes. The vast majority of their budgets – funds that have been at the disposal of regional officials – have been revenues from taxes constituting state income and subsidies from the state budget. Today, Poland is a unitary country, where the regions are self-governing institutions, and their status has been judicially protected. Before the systemic changes initiated in 1989 (that resulted by changing the number of regions from 49 to 16), the region was an

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Figure 1. Lubelskie and Silesia regions and their location in both Poland and Europe. Source: Author.
Table 2. Characteristics of the regions included in the case studies.

| Elements of regional characteristics | Lubelskie region | Silesia region |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| **Area**                             | 25,123 km² (third largest in the country) | 12,333 km² (14th largest in the country) |
| **Population**                       | 2.1 million (10th largest in the country) | 4.5 million (second largest in the country) |
| **Percentage of national gross domestic product (GDP) generated in regions** | 3.7% (11th largest amount in comparison with the other regions; 16th per capita) | 12.3% (second largest amount in comparison with the other regions; fourth per capita) |
| **Dominant structural problems**     | Unfavourable structure (dominance of agriculture) and low level of innovativeness of the economy | Lowest economic activity rate of the population in the whole country |
|                                      | Large number of places at risk of socio-economic marginalization | Burden of historical dependence of local labour markets on traditional industries (especially mining) |
|                                      |                                | Disproportions of potential and economic activity of different parts of the region |
| **Elements of a strategic vision of regional development** | Rational use of socio-economic specificity, environmental resources and polycentricity of the urban centres network | ‘Green Silesia’. A modern European region with a competitive economy resulting from a responsible transformation |
| **Ways of perceiving regions in the national regional policy and national politics** | Eastern Poland (including Lubelskie) as one of the two areas, next to the Silesia Region, struggling with adaptation and restructuring difficulties | Silesia as one of the two areas, next to Eastern Poland, struggling with adaptation and restructuring difficulties |
|                                      | Support for Eastern Poland as a tool for equalizing opportunities and shaping territorial justice | Transformation of Silesia as a symbol of different visions of the energy transformation and conflicts between the state and various social groups, with the involvement of strong trade unions |
| **Selected support instruments from the national/EU level** | Eastern Poland National Operational Program (mostly EU financed) | Program for Silesia (resulting from the national long-term development strategy) |
|                                      | EU Just Transition Fund | State law concerning the metropolitan union in Silesia |
| **Characteristics of the spatial system** | Largest city and capital of the region (Lublin), situated in the centre, apart from that, small and medium-sized urban centres | Historically shaped, the polycentric network of urban centres divided into four areas of development policy |
|                                      | Lowest urbanization rate in the country | Highest rate of urbanization in the country |
| Characteristics of institutional metropolitan cooperation | Cooperation of local governments driven by the EU Integrated Territorial Investments mechanism, based on the weak formula of the agreement (from 2015), but evolving towards stronger formalization | Model of cooperation between local governments, which has been established since the 2000s Only region in the country with a formally established, in 2017, metropolitan union: Upper Silesian and Zagłębie Metropolis (Metropolis GZM) |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Categories and number of respondents included in the research | Total number of interviews: 31; including: representatives of public institutions, 16; and representatives of social organizations, business organizations, universities and the media, 15 | Total number of interviews: 29; including: representatives of public institutions, 14; and representatives of social organizations, business organizations, universities and the media, 15 |

Sources: Author, based Eurostat (2020), Samorząd Województwa Lubelskiego (2021) and Samorząd Województwa Śląskiego (2020).
element of the unified state power system (in the years 1945–89). Going back even further, in the interwar period (1918–39) the main task of the state authorities was to consolidate three areas into one system, previously under three partitions for over a century. In the above context, dating back to even earlier times, the ‘statehood’ of Silesia and the Lubelskie regions developed differently. In the first case, unlike in Lubelskie, different parts of Silesia in distinct historical periods changed its ‘statehood’.

The EU territorial agenda has significantly influenced the spatial politics of the modern Polish state, even though the recent direction of the national regional policy has often been out of line with EU goals. One can say that it has come a full circle from equalizing differences, through ensuring rapid growth (starting in urban centres and diffusing to the other parts of the country), and back to equalizing differences (Gorzelak & Smętkowski, 2018). Importantly, while the National Strategy for Regional Development of 2010 recognized the need to build strong institutions at the regional level, decentralize the country’s development governance system and support institutional cooperation within metropolitan areas, similar arrangements were not included in the document of the same status from 2019.

WHO CONSTRUCTS THE REGIONAL AND METROPOLITAN SCALES AND WHY?

Elements of regional and metropolitan discourses

Table 3 presents the main components considered by the interviewees as elements of the construction of regions and metropolitan areas in a given place and time. The proposed comparison allows for the analysis of the results in various approaches: between and within the regions – considering all the relations identified in their areas, or by juxtaposing regional and metropolitan imaginaries. Moreover, it allows one to recognize how these imaginaries fit into state politics and policies.

In both cases, actors from every sector included in the research perceive the notion of the region as a relevant point of reference for their activities. As a result, it is possible to indicate the social basis that gives legitimacy to the actions and policies pursued by regional authorities and officials. This legitimacy rests on the common understanding of the transformational needs within both areas. Depending on the region, however, respondents perceive the ways of achieving this goal differently. They also assign diverse roles in this process to the institutions analysed and public policies.

Therefore, when asked about what constructs the region, one can say that in the case of the Lubelskie region, these are, first and foremost, external investments and decisions resulting from the EU, as well as national policies. In the case of Silesia, local authorities, and representatives of business organizations or universities have undertaken actions to achieve their goals, on the understanding that they work for the benefit of the entire region to foster its transformation. One can also refer to the differences in the perception of the aims and current fix in the metropolitan formation processes. The absolute confidence in the Lublin Metropolitan Area is due to the fact that momentum has been built over recent years and that there is still will to develop it further, based on a common shared purpose. As the head of one of the communities, neighbouring Lublin said: ‘perhaps the most important thing is that we realized that we have a lot in common. Added to this is the integration of those local governments, officials, and coordinators who worked in multiple thematic groups’.

In Silesia, however, the situation is more complex. It is justified to claim that the establishment of a metropolitan union used to be a regional raison d’état (although the role of regional authorities in efforts to create the union remains invisible). While in the area around Lublin there is a clear cause for further cooperation (currently mainly between local authorities), in Silesia both the social basis and vision of the metropolitan area are, to a large extent, based on the
### Table 3. Dimensions of regional and metropolitan relations indicated by the respondents.

| Dimension | Lubelskie region | Silesia region |
|-----------|------------------|----------------|
| **Three formal dimensions** | | |
| Modes of representation | | |
| Regional scale | Metropolitan scale | Regional scale | Metropolitan scale |
| Sufficient access to the region for business organizations, universities and a limited group of social activists – their aim is mainly to give opinions about current affairs | Decisions are taken by local authorities | Regional level is not a significant point of reference for universities and business organizations in terms of the need to represent their interests – if necessary, however, this representation is secured for them | Openness to the business and science community |
| Perceptible threats of clientelism in favouring specific local governments due to political party affiliation | No possibility of formal direct pressure or influence from interest groups | Perceptible threats of clientelism in favouring specific local governments due to political party affiliation | Threat of unequal distribution of benefits among the members of the metropolitan union |
| Region as a structure weakly anchored within the state apparatus | No obvious link to the representation of social interests | Pluralism in terms of access to the metropolitan entity for local authorities | Metropolitan union as an element of the fight for positions for political parties |
| Other actors contact regional authorities/officials to consult/discuss EU funds implementation, or the works on the regional development strategy | Pluralism in terms of access to the metropolitan entity for local authorities | Representative the interests of local government by distributing EU funds | Pluralism in terms of local government cooperation structures, the experience of which has been used by the metropolitan union |
| Direct communication channels between region and EU institutions, as well as between Polish regional representatives | Decisions are taken by local authorities | No access to the region for residents | |
| EU Integrated Territorial Investments as an instrument of pressure on the region (representing the interests of local governments) | No possibility of formal direct pressure or influence from interest groups | Regional level is not a significant point of reference for universities and business organizations in terms of the need to represent their interests – if necessary, however, this representation is secured for them | |
| New opportunities for interpersonal relations | No obvious link to the representation of social interests | Pluralism in terms of access to the metropolitan entity for local authorities | |
| Building an apolitical metropolitan project | Pluralism in terms of access to the metropolitan entity for local authorities | Representative the interests of local government by distributing EU funds | |
| Local authorities from outside the metropolitan structures aim to join them or have their own functional area | Decisions are taken by local authorities | No access to the region for residents | |
| Building a metropolitan union based on the extensive experience of cooperation between local governments within the region (including the implementation of EU funds) | Building a metropolitan union based on the extensive experience of cooperation between local governments within the region (including the implementation of EU funds) | Building a metropolitan union based on the extensive experience of cooperation between local governments within the region (including the implementation of EU funds) | |
| Demanding and undefined character of the relations of the metropolitan union authorities with the national and regional governments representatives | Building a metropolitan union based on the extensive experience of cooperation between local governments within the region (including the implementation of EU funds) | Building a metropolitan union based on the extensive experience of cooperation between local governments within the region (including the implementation of EU funds) | |

(Continued)
Table 3. Continued.

| Dimension                  | Lubelskie region                          | Silesia region                          |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| **Modes of intervention**  | Institution managing the EU-funded Regional Operational Program | Funds from the Regional Operational Program for metropolitan projects, primarily for the improvement of internal public transport within the area and to its capital – Lublin | Own activities of universities and business organizations for the region, including those implemented on a national and international scale |
|                            | Large-scale infrastructure investments (e.g., construction of an airport, express roads) | In future, social infrastructure and climate change adaptation projects/investments | Various actors coalescing around regional projects |
|                            | Representing the region’s interests at the national level | Organization of cooperation and exchange between metropolitan institutions within the country | Implementation of EU projects in cooperation with public authorities and other actors |
|                            | Regional development strategy as an indirect basis for obtaining external funds for local governments | **Regional scale**                        | **Metropolitan scale**                        |
|                            | **Regional scale**                        | **Metropolitan scale**                   | **Regional scale**                        |
|                            | **Metropolitan scale**                   | **Regional scale**                        | **Metropolitan scale**                        |

**Three substantive dimensions**

| Social basis of the region/metropolitan area | Confidence that it has been necessary to instantly make up for developmental delays and underinvestment in Eastern Poland | None, varied or inconcrete imaginaries about the metropolitan area | A region undergoing transformation, which needs specific intervention in state policy, but especially taking responsibility for its future within the region (by different actors) |
|                                            | Capital of the region (Lublin) as its showcase and symbol of change | A common awareness of the existence of a metropolitan union | The need to shift the region to new industries, new technologies, and new modes of thinking |
|                                            | A region undergoing transformation, which needs specific intervention in state policy, but especially taking responsibility for its future within the region (by different actors) | Awareness of the possibility of obtaining additional funds and/or achieving their goals by different actors | The metropolitan union as a new platform for formal and informal relations |
|                                            | The need to shift the region to new industries, new technologies, and new modes of thinking | Desire for public transport problems to be resolved | The metropolitan union as a new platform for formal and informal relations |
| Regional/metropolitan project | The prominence of the region depends on the directions of state policy, and the pace of negotiations within institutions at the EU level concerning the EU Cohesion Policy. Communication with partners relates mainly to the implementation of EU projects, but (as a rule) not other strategic issues. |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| So far, the capacity to act depends on external funds, national policy, and an understanding with the members of the regional administration. |
| The creation of a metropolitan union used to be one of the main purposes of regional policy, although the regional authorities did not contribute to it. The regional administration has been supporting the cooperation between local governments in the implementation of EU funds. |
| Three categories of members of the metropolitan union: the leading main cities, the disadvantaged and the peripheries. Undefined place within the institutional architecture of the state and the region. Building a metropolitan project based on the transparent and successful experiences of previous and ongoing cooperation. |

| Vision of the region/metropolitan area | Region as a vehicle for raising external investment and funds from the EU. |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The starting point of the cooperation has been the implementation of the EU funded projects. The will at a managerial level to include non-public actors in future works, but without a clear vision of the future aim of the metropolitan institution. |
| Contrasting views: a region in planned and assisted transformation, shifting away from heavy industry versus a region being the object of external decisions and processes without the concept (with regard to regional authorities) for transformation and dialogue with partners. |
| Additional funds for the region from the central budget. Opportunity to solve the problems related to the organization of public transport. |

Source: Author’s own elaboration.
imaginaries of future projects and solutions. This conclusion is well illustrated by the narrative of the representative of the authorities of the metropolitan union:

I see the added values from the creation of the metropolis in the time horizon. … A joint ticket, those things that you can read in the media. … There is great potential for these values to show up. You have to be patient, and our tasks, goals will be more visible.

Regarding the perception of regional and metropolitan constructs in the context of its functioning within the state structures, in Lubelskie, the dominant attitude is to admit that this region is an essential tool in the implementation of state policy and that its profits from the current situation should be maximized. Another voice of local authorities can be considered representative compared with the statements of the other interviewees:

It is evident, that after the partitions we were left behind. First, in terms of infrastructure, we have to chase south-western partitions. … I am glad that the East of the country is more appreciated now. Part of this translates into concrete actions, and part of it is just propaganda. If Via Carpatia\(^2\) is built, it will be tangible proof that the East is regaining its splendor.

When delineating the futures of their organizations, local authorities, and also the other actors, recognize that they will be influenced by the success of (or its lack of) investments in large infrastructure projects resulting from national policies, and supported by regional authorities. In Silesia, global trends and decision-making processes situated above the region influence the mode of its transformation. Actors from all the sectors, however, adopt a more proactive approach, taking into account not only the interests of their organizations, local communities, but also the interests of the regional community. This is well illustrated by the response of the President of the Regional Chamber of Commerce:

Our name, meaning regional, is misleading because we operate very globally. Proportionally, when I look at new companies, more or less 50–60% are from outside the Silesia region. The increase is due to those activities that we strongly engage. We are the largest multi-industry chamber in the country.

Situating regional and metropolitan discourses in the wider framework of SRA

In the next step of the analysis, one can generalize the previous findings and subsequently place them within the pattern of the other elements of SRA, which are: principles of socio-spatial relations, contradictions based on these relations, spatio-temporal strategies and meta-governance capacities. As indicated in Table 4, one can observe differences both between and within regions concerning all these elements.

The starting point was the identification of the dominant principles of socio-spatial relations. The notion of territory was linked to the spatial borders and powers of regional governments and metropolitan entities. The term ‘place’ was attached to the specific elements of the identity of cities and regions. The notion of the scale was linked to the hierarchical system of entities performing their tasks within state structures. The concept of the networks meant building personal relations between representatives of the public sector, science, business and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In the case of the Lubelskie region, both within the regional and metropolitan spaces, territory can be identified as the dominant socio-spatial principle. Regarding the regional scale, it can be explained as building, by the public authorities, the capacity to manage the territory of the region through the implementation of activities addressed to distinct areas of it, in particular, based on funds and decisions made at higher levels of government (which is related to the
scale as a second dominant socio-spatial principle). In turn, the perception of relations around the metropolitan scale tends more towards networks, understood as creating intergovernmental arrangements and connections around the city of Lublin, and to support its leadership for the whole region. In the Silesia region, the regional mode of socio-spatial relations can be described as place and networks oriented. This is because interviewees often consider their daily activities in a broader context of the interests of the entire region. They identify with this place, notice its diversity, and attach importance to the direction in which it is going. They also place Silesia on the map of nodes, connections, and experiences drawn from other countries. While trying to recognize the main socio-spatial principles of the metropolitan relations in Silesia, one should refer to networks, also the territory – understood in this case as being in the process of construction of its borders and scope of activities. In both cases, the defined principles of socio-spatial relations within a regional scale influence their configuration on the metropolitan scale. The rules for the construction of partnerships on a regional scale, established in Silesia two decades ago, facilitate the creation of a coalition of public and non-public actors for the benefit of the metropolitan union. In Lubelskie, hierarchical power relations within the regional scale hinder the metropolitan entity from breaking the same pattern.

A given spatiotemporal fix also comprises of contradictions, as well as strategies adopted by specific actors to achieve their goals. The temporalization strategy, indicated as the leading one in the Lubelskie region, assumes the maximization of the benefits for the region (and thus individual actors) in the coming years. It results from the priorities of this area in the policies

Table 4. Strategic–relational approach (SRA) elements: characteristics of regions.

| Selected aspects of socio-spatial relations | Lubelskie region | Silesia region |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Dominant socio-spatial principles          | Territory-scale: intergovernmental arrangements for coordinating different scales | Territory–place networks: integrating places/relations into a territory, building networks of nodal connectivity | Place networks: local, urban, regional governance or partnerships |
| Dominant contradictions within regional and metropolitan spaces | Demand for a swift transformation of the region versus weakness of the region within the state structures | Ability versus inability to balance social forces/imaginaries/interests within the metropolitan scale | Ability versus inability of different actors to follow/balance externalities that influence the region |
| Main spatio-temporal strategies            | Temporalization | Temporalization–prioritization | Spatialization | Hierarchization |
| Meta-governance capacities                 | Capacity to govern the region lies beyond its borders | Intergovernmental arrangements as a possible way to multilevel governance (MLG) and meta-governance | Shared intentionality of actors from different sectors to transform the region | Establishment of the metropolitan union as a result of regional meta-governance |

Sources: Author’s own elaboration based on Jessop (2016a, 2016b).
implemented at national and EU levels. At the metropolitan scale, the temporalization–prioritization strategy also assumes the most comprehensive possible use of the current policies and funds. Simultaneously, public actors aim to define the priorities for their future cooperation (public transport, social infrastructure). This strategy, however, does not respond to the dominant contradiction identified for the metropolitan area.

In the case of Silesia, spatialization has been the strategy to address the dominant contradiction by either using different networks, places, or actions to balance the externalities that influence the region or to displace the problems that occur within its borders. In the case of the metropolitan scale in Silesia, this strategy is hierarchization. This is understood as setting the most important, long-term goals of the metropolitan union (which, does not appear to have happened yet), and along the way, the implementation of other, smaller scale activities, also in close cooperation with different actors. The nature of the relations described in this section also results in the scope of capacities concerning meta-governance, understood as ‘governance of governance’ (Jessop, 2016b; Servillo, 2019). Depending on the circumstances, they are placed at different levels within the state apparatus or are assigned to the abilities of actors operating (directly and indirectly) to realize a common regional interest (Table 4).

Referring to the construction of the TPSN model, one should note that the categories proposed by Jessop et al. (2008) have been pertinent in describing existing socio-spatial relations, but have not been exclusive of explanatory power (Paasi, 2008). It can be seen mainly in the example of the Lubelskie region. The ways of understanding the notions of territory and scale have been driven in Lubelskie by interrelated state ideology and regional identity. They have been based on the common perception of spatial and social exclusion of the region within the country. Hence, the actions and relations of actors from all sectors have aimed at a physical and symbolic co-opting of this space to the rest of the country. In the case of Silesia, the category of state ideology was not a discernable or driving factor for the interviewees. To a lesser extent, it was also a regional identity: visible but perceived in relation to the individual goals and activities of local governments, business organizations and universities.

**CENTRALIZED OR DISPERSED POWER RELATIONS IN REGIONS AND WEAK EVIDENCE OF REGIONAL POLITICAL RESCALING**

Jessop (2016b, p. 96) writes that ‘the state power is a mediated effect of the changing balance among all forces in a given situation’. In this context, the results of this study can be analysed either in terms of how the state power is implemented or shaped in regional and metropolitan spaces or whether and in what contexts can we speak of ‘regional and metropolitan powers’. Although the analysed actors operate within the same unitary state system, there are power relations of a different nature within both regions. In the case of Lubelskie, the region is considered as a tool aimed at either implementing state policy or lobbying at the central level for new funds and investments. Therefore, the power over the region has been beyond the will and possibilities of the actors operating within its territory. In other words, the power has been centralized at the national level. At the same time, however, actors from various sectors have a common sense of influence on the directions of the regional policy conducted at the regional level. Local authorities within Lublin Metropolitan Area have been empowered in relations with regional authorities through the EU-led Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) instrument. Representatives of universities and business organizations, in turn, have such opportunities through activities in advisory bodies at various levels and personal contacts, in particular with representatives of the City of Lublin, the capital of the region. Thus, in this case the region is considered as a means to secure and legitimate the state ideology (Paasi, 2008, 2010). It should also be noted that it has been constructed by the daily activities of non-public
actors. They treat it not just as a means to protect its interests, but also to occasionally support joint intersectoral activities aimed at implementing large investment projects in the region.

In the case of power relations in Silesia, they are more dispersed. While most actors indicate the need for transformation, it is difficult to identify the centre from which this power flows. Representatives of business and universities do, often under their own initiative, work (even on an international scale) for the region’s benefit. However, these actions legitimize and support public authorities. The authorities of the newly established metropolitan union have been trying, in turn, to find their place within the structures of public administration. At the same time, regional authorities aim to be pragmatic in their relations with both central government and the EU, but the consistent and long-term direction of these activities is difficult to identify for actors from various sectors. It is also difficult for them to translate the decisions made at the regional level to their daily activities (except for the implementation of the mostly EU-financed projects).

Concerning the issue of establishing a metropolitan union in Silesia, one should note that, as in the case of the process of creating business regions in Denmark, this was the political response of municipal authorities to governance gaps at the regional scale and in national policies (Ølesen & Hansen, 2020). The establishment of the metropolitan union in Silesia can be considered as an example of state restructuring since it is the first organization of this type in the state structures. However, it is unclear now to what extent its authorities and the other actors will be able to anchor a new model of governance in the region. A far-reaching difficulty in this context has been the lack of a main goal of this institution – apart from the implementation of services related to public transport – identified by representatives of local governments. As the president of one of the cities said: ‘the metropolis has some good ideas, but they will not determine the future of Upper Silesia. There is a sound idea for a metropolitan bike system, there is an idea of integrating recreational areas, but they will not be the salt of this earth. They will not decide what people will live on.’ Failure to identify such a target may lead to a reproduction of the situation that for years has been present in relations between the central and Silesian regional government: as a representative of the authorities of one of the universities stated, the issue of transformation of the region has been permanently the subject of shifting responsibility between these levels of governance.

The above findings lead directly to the works of D’Albergo and Lefèvre (2018), Fricke and Gualini (2018), Gualini and Fricke (2019) and Nelles et al. (2018) regarding metropolitan discourses, metropolitan construction processes, and strategic–relational understanding of rescaling processes. Using the categories from the study by D’Albergo and Lefèvre (2018), one can say that the economic, spatial, and political dimensions of the metropolitan scale in the Lubelskie region share the character of the ‘metropolitan spaces in the organization.’ In the case of Silesia, the spatial and economic dimensions of the metropolitan scale have been configured, and the economic dimension remains undefined. Undoubtedly, we are also dealing with a new political entity – the explicit political–institutional project (Gualini & Fricke, 2019) – but as mentioned earlier, it is hard to indicate where it stands within the structures of the state and the region. Furthermore, the implementation of the explicit project will be related to urban growth policies implemented in the most developed cities of the region. Their aspirations and policies may constitute the explicit project that can affect the institutionalized metropolitan agenda. The role of 14 cities located in the centre of Silesia and the metropolitan union, as well as Lublin – the capital of Lubelskie and the leader of the ITI initiative – can also be considered in the context of state rescaling processes. The implementation of their interests within metropolitan structures and the seeking of their support among smaller local governments should, in the long term, strengthen this component of the policy within the state. Nevertheless, the multiplicity of these interests in Silesia (unlike in Lubelskie) makes it difficult to implement a common agenda and thus inhibits the transformation of power relations in the region, as well as between regional and state agencies.
In their work on governance networks in building metropolitan scale, Nelles et al. (2018) prove that in the cases analysed by the authors (Berlin, Delhi, New York, Paris, Rome and Shenzhen) networks were more top-down than had been previously assumed and that public actors were the ones who took responsibility for framing specific projects and agendas. D’Albergo and Lefèvre (2018) claim that, in the same cases, there is weak evidence of political rescaling concerning the construction of metropolitan scales. In the cases analysed in this text, it is possible to move the debate and point to weak evidence of political rescaling also in the regional contexts. Even though this evidence is different in the case of Lubelskie and Silesia, in both of them regional governments act mainly as implementors, lobbyists and followers in relation to decisions made at the national level. Thus, the process of political rescaling is incomplete and suspended, and at the level of state policy, there is no decision on the place of the region within the state polity. In recent years the process of departing from the partnership-based approach to regional authorities has been visible at the central level. The above conclusions correspond to one of the main theses of Brenner (2004), according to which, despite the transformation of statehood, state institutions play a central role in formulating and monitoring urban policies.

‘SUPERVISORS IN SUSPENSION’ AND ‘STEWARDS OF HOPE’: STRUGGLING WITH/FOR TRANSFORMATIONS

Summarizing the results, one can conclude that diverse socio-economic and historical profiles of Lubelskie and Silesia, and varying tendencies regarding the scope of cooperation and activities within the metropolitan scale have influenced the current shape of regional and metropolitan discourses. In both cases, we are dealing with regions undergoing transformation (or the intention thereof). Specific actors, however, adopt different attitudes and strategies in their efforts to achieve this goal and perceive their daily activities individually in this context. Considering the perspective of over 30 years of systemic transformation in Poland, the lack of establishment of a governance scale below the national level, within which it would be possible (based on appropriate competencies and resources) to realize policies aimed at solving major social problems, could be perceived as governance or meta-governance failure. Here even more so because, as indicated below, there is a social basis for the implementation of comprehensive public policies at this level. On the other hand, the actors’ attitudes show that within the same state governance system there are examples of governance modes based not only on exchange and command (like in Lubelskie) but also on dialogue and solidarity, as in the case of Silesia (Jessop, 2016b).

Therefore, it can be said that in the given circumstances ‘the region’ has been perceived as a ‘supervisor in suspension’ – an entity with competence in the implementation of EU funds, but without the ability to carry out its strategic projects. On the other hand, new metropolitan actors in the existing systems of socio-spatial relations allow the introduction of not only new governance but also meta-governance mechanisms, hence their ‘stewards of hope’ image in the analysed discourses. Despite the weak political position of the region within the national policies, one can say that the regional scale, due to its easily identifiable social basis, may become the arena of agonistic struggles (Varró & Lagendijk, 2013). However, this requires the skills and willingness of regional authorities to politicize, within the regional scale, the daily activities carried out by various actors, as well as the day-to-day need of its inhabitants. Referring precisely to the cases analysed, it means that there is a potential – among the inhabitants of Lubelskie and Silesia – to accept the transfer of decision-making processes closer to regional centres. In the case of Silesia, this is conditioned by the history of the region, its statehood changing over the centuries, and traditions supporting the autonomy of the region within the state structures. In the second case, it is a new phenomenon. Paradoxically, it is supported by discourse at the national level: the Law and Justice party, which has been in power since 2015, centralizes the country’s governance system and at the same time emphasizes financial transfers and
investments in the regions of the eastern part of the country, which in turn leads to the strengthening of regional identities.

It is also reasonable to ask about the consequences of the research approach applied in this paper (Paasi & Metzger, 2017). First, one should be aware of the fragmentary nature of the description (Paasi, 2010). Many localities and contexts were included, but some of them may have been omitted. Second, it must be admitted that the adopted approach reduces the possibility of considering the perspective of households, micro-scale interventions, networks or initiatives, virtual spaces, and young inhabitants of regions. The mere awareness of these limitations requires looking critically at the research results, but it may also indicate future research directions. Third, when ‘politics of power is the art of possible’ (Jessop, 2016b, p. 92), awareness of certain discourses can shape the background for political actions and support the political rescaling debate.

In conclusion, several implications for regional scholarship emerge from the study. The SRA approach to the socio-spatial analysis with the TPSN framework at its centre allows the identification and combination of numerous strategies and narratives undertaken by public and non-public actors within regional and metropolitan spaces. The applied research approach proves the usefulness of the TPSN model not only for the analysis of the genesis and course of implementation of specific public policies but also for the study of ongoing transformations of state structures and the construction of regional identities. It is especially relevant in the context of vocal regionalisms in European countries. The research results complement the studies on regionalization processes in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. So far, they have focused primarily on the institutional and economic dimensions of integration, often omitting the social aspects. The analysis of the two Polish regions reveals the social embeddedness of the European and global discourses on the transformation of socio-economic systems in these areas. If equipped with appropriate powers, the regional institutions and the regional communities behind them may be more effective key ambassadors of transformation than the central state structures.

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NOTES

1 In principle, the Lubelskie and Silesia regions have been below the national average (each time below the European average) in indicators such as the European Social Progress Index (2020), the European Regional Competitiveness Index (2019) and the European Quality of Government Index (2017). These regions also face a low social capital index compared with
other regions in Poland. This index combines indicators related to participation in cultural events, reading, membership in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and sports clubs, expenditure of local governments on culture, and demographic resilience. Lubelskie is ranked 13th, and Silesia 10th, out of 16 regions in the country.

2 Via Carpatia is a motorway under construction that will run through Poland. Its main trail starts in Klaipeda and ends in Istanbul, Turkey (for more, see Rosik et al., 2018).

3 The ITI instrument also has been implemented in Silesia. Due to its specificity, unlike in Lubelskie, it has been implemented throughout the region by four subregional institutions in the areas of the voivodeship development policy, which have been present in its strategic documents since the beginning of the 2000s. The ITI has served, therefore, to professionalize Silesian local governments, but it has not been a breakthrough as it has been in the Lubelskie region. Thus, one can claim that while in the Lubelskie region the implementation of ITI has launched the processes of political rescaling, in the case of Silesia ITI supports these processes indirectly – the metropolitan union has been based on governance experience previously existing in the region, including that of planning and implementing ITI.

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