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**THE URBAN REGIME THEORY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE
RESEARCH — THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS
OF IMPLEMENTATION**

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Abstract

The article discusses novel methodology. The main aim of the paper is to analyse the explanatory potential of the urban regime theory used in political science studies. The author verifies the hypothesis which states that the explanatory potential of the urban regime theory, understood as the ability to explain the dynamic transformations of the socio-political reality of modern cities, is derived from the possibility of using a set of research methods, and not only those that are of “customary” (traditional) interest to political scientists. This set includes eight different research methods, selected on the basis of a review of the positions and methodological approaches dominating in the extensive literature on the subject. The hypothesis verification determines the structure of the article, which consists of the considerations focused around: (1) theoretical issues (2) methodological assumptions of the presented analysis, and (3) variants of the examination of the urban regime. The analysis confirms the hypothesis and proves that the application potential of the urban regime theory results from the possibility of using at least several research methods, with particular emphasis on those that are just gaining popularity among political scientists.

Keywords: urban regime, city, research methods, political research, implementation**Introduction**

The decomposition of the traditional (classic) mechanisms of aggregation and dispersion of power conditioned by the processes of globalization, Europeanization and regionalization (Wiszniowski 2013, 19–26; Bartolini 2005, 381) raises the question of the importance of not only new forms but also, and perhaps above all, new levels of governance¹.

1 The author of this article does not decide at this point about which interpretation version of the government is referred to. It does not mean, however, that the author does not notice and signal the sequence of transformations described on the continuum between the traditionally understood public administration and the classically understood activity of its organs, and public governance and its participatory approach characteristic (see: Izdebski 2007, 7–20).

Therefore, a reflection devoted to contemporary cities and actors (entities)² comes into light. The need for studies focused around the so-called urban issue, often emphasized by several disciplines (including sociologists, political scientists, economists, geographers, urban planners and architects) seems to be justified by the mosaic of different (although closely related and mutually reinforcing) phenomena and patterns³. The initial review of numerous theoretical and empirical proposals suggests that it is this diversity that clearly conditions the interdisciplinary nature of the published papers.

The notable relevance of the city as a research category⁴ has specific consequences for political science research. First of all, the necessity of a conceptual answer to these analyses is clear, which, although they relate to the city and its functioning, are, however, outside the immediate, “customary” interest area of the discipline’s representatives (remembering that the attention of political scientists is focused primarily on the mechanisms of gaining and maintaining broadly understood power). Secondly, the demarcation of the boundaries between the urban and the political plays a key role. The indisputable semantic capacity of both categories means that the precise (detailed) recognition of the surfaces of their mutual “overlapping” is a difficult task because it involves a significant risk of error. The urban regime theory, which is gaining popularity especially in Anglo-Saxon academia, is an interpretative variant of mutual and non-obvious connections.

The main aim of the article is to analyze the explanatory potential of the urban regime theory which explores “political phenomena and processes, their determinants and consequences” (Antoszewski 2004, 326). The research aim formulated in this way takes on special significance in a situation where not only the borders, but also the status and identity of the discipline are the subject of lively environmental debate⁵. The narrow framework of this study does not allow for a holistic view of the issues in question. However, they allow the author to outline the perspective in which the explanatory potential of the urban regime theory, understood as the ability to explain the dynamic transformations of the socio-political reality of modern cities, is subject to discussion and evaluation.

The aim of the article is not to debate the well-established contributions that the urban regime theory has made towards political science. It would be a truism to say that urban regime theory is often utilized within the discipline. On the other hand, the author will verify the hypothesis, which argues how the explanatory potential of the urban regime theory is derived from using a set of research methods, and not only those aforementioned customary interests of political scientists, namely: (1) institutional and legal analysis, (2) content analysis, (3) decision analysis, (4) system analysis, (5) network analysis, (6) surveys, (7) interview (free and/or structured), (8) shadowing. The reason why there is

2 Both — “entity” and “actor” — will be treated as synonymous.

3 These are the phenomena and tendencies which support the hypothesis of the “urban revival” hypothesis (see: Storper, Manville 2006, 1247–1274; Turok, Mykhnenko 2010, 165–182). The limited formula of this study determines that they are not the subject of the author’s consideration.

4 For the purpose of the article, it is assumed that “the most general concept, with the highest degree of abstraction” is a research category is. It is also a concept of fundamental importance for a given field or discipline of science (Karwat 1981, 109).

5 For the status and condition of the discipline, see: Dryzek, Leonard 1988; King, Schlozman, Nie 2009; Blondel, Vanesson 2010; Klementewicz 2010; Karwat 2010; Krazu-Mozer, Borowiec, Ścigaj 2011; Rosicki, Szweczek 2012; Skarżyński 2012; Krauz-Mozer, Borowiec, Ścigaj 2013; Flinders, John 2013; Szczepański 2013; Janusz 2015; Ulicka 2015; Wallas 2015; Wojtaszczyk 2015; Żukiewicz, Fellner 2015; Donovan, Larkin 2016; Blok 2018.

a division into customary and uncustomary” research methods, as well as the reason for building the above eight-element set, will be discussed later in the article.

The way of constructing the hypothesis results from the assumption that a skilful juxtaposition and, consequently, the use of at least several complementary research methods is a *sine qua non* condition for the detailed recognition of the quirks of the urban regime’s functioning⁶. Testing the hypothesis will allow the author to answer the following research questions: (1) which methods, detailed above, can potentially explain the essence of the urban regime? (2) can political scientists with their existing methodological tools examine such a complex structure as the urban regime?

It should be emphasized that the above set of methods is a model proposition to study the urban regime, as it is intentionally simplified and imperfect. Therefore, it may be supplemented and corrected. Furthermore, the set in question clearly draws on the methodological approaches presented in the extensive literature on the subject. It has therefore a compiling and synthesizing character.

The hypothesis verification determines the article’s structure, which is focused around: (1) theoretical issues, (2) methodological assumptions of the presented analysis, and (3) variants of the examination of the urban regime. The summary presents the most important observations and conclusions.

Urban regime theory

There are at least three considerations which demonstrate the significance of scientific analysis of the urban regime theory. First, the redefinition of local government processes which involve entities having not only a different formal and legal status, but also diverse resources. Second, the research on broadly understood urban policy⁷ seem to be no less important, as well as, to some extent, the “natural” desire to “test” new theoretical approaches (the urban regime theory should be considered a new one, especially in relation to the research conducted in Central and Eastern Europe). The important and valid question about the real mechanisms of local governance is the third element. After all, it is at the heart of inquiries made by political scientists.

As Jonathan S. Davies rightly notes, the urban regime theory “is a dominant paradigm of the research on urban policy of liberal democracies” (2002, 1). The dynamic development of the studies on urban regimes of the Anglo-Saxon countries and, to a slightly lesser extent, the European cultural circle (cf. Pierre 2014), seems to be derivative of the conditions analyzed in at least two perspectives⁸.

6 The research method is defined as an effective and repeatable way of finding a solution to a specific research problem (cf. Nowak 2020).

7 There is no doubt that the term “urban policy” is blurred which means that it can be interpreted in different ways. The definition difficulties are further compounded by the fact that local issues, due to their complexity and multidimensionality, are of interest not only for political scientists but also for the representatives of related scientific disciplines. For the purpose of the article, it is therefore quite simplified that urban policy, understood through the prism of urban actors’ activity, integrates two dimensions. The first dimension comes down to achieving political goals. The essence of the second dimension is, however, to meet the needs of the local government community (see: Auerbach 2013).

8 The urban regime theory was the subject of the author’s reflection presented in the monograph ‘Polityka miejska w marketingu prezydentów największych miast Dolnego Śląska’ (Eng. ‘Urban policy in the marketing of the presidents of the largest cities of Lower Silesia’), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2020. Although the article refers to the content included in the monograph, the characteristics of the

The first of them (the “practical”) refers to the functioning of cities as autonomous, and thus becoming more significant, spatial and administrative structures. The progressing, and thus not fully controlled processes of declining of the territorial order of the state imply numerous development tasks which must be performed by cities. The success of these tasks is, in turn, conditioned by the sector-oriented (problem-oriented) activity of the entities operating on a local level.

The second perspective, the “theoretical”, postulates the response to the challenges observed of local government practice. Numerous publications, often based on extensive empirical and source material analysis, therefore illustrate the conditions, mechanisms and results of the above-mentioned activity of urban actors (cf. Wiktorska-Święcka 2013; Kołomycew, Kotarba 2014; Wiktorska-Święcka, Kozak 2014; Kuć-Czajkowska, Wasil 2015; Wiktorska-Święcka 2015; Sidor, Kuć-Czajkowska 2016; Wiktorska Świąćka 2016; Sidor, Kuć-Czajkowska, Wasil 2017; Drzonek 2018; Radzik-Maruszak 2019; Pawłowska, Kmiecik, Radzik-Maruszak, Antkowiak, Kołomycew 2020). It does not depend on the environmental context (spatial, economic, cultural and socio-political) which determines the actions of actors, both individual and collective ones.

Although urban regimes studies successfully integrate the above-detailed perspectives of the functioning of modern cities, looking at local actors is an element which clearly distinguishes the research conducted by the supporters of the urban regime theory. Advocates of the theory emphasize the key role of arrangements related to: (1) the status and number of actors involved, (2) the motives for their cooperation and (3) the type of finally formed urban regime. The essence of scientific inquiry into these three issues is briefly characterized below⁹.

First, the purpose of studying the urban regime is to define the actors who have an empirical and not just declared (official) influence on local government processes, including local decision-making. A review of the positions presented by the theory’s supporters allows one to draw the conclusion that the city is a field of activity of public (government) entities and market-oriented (profit-oriented) private entities operating at the local level. Some researchers also emphasize the importance of activity of social (non-governmental) entities¹⁰. The number of actors involved, regardless of their status, can vary over time until the regime is formed.

Secondly, the belief in the limited potential of the normative (procedural) approach means that the urban regime theory’s proponents focus on non-institutionalized and less comprehensible forms of cooperation between individual groups of entities¹¹. Although all the entities involved strive to achieve different goals (which results from activities within the political, economic and social fields), the prospect of increasing their resources encourages them to cooperate. The cooperation is therefore a result of particular motives.

Thirdly, the theory’s advocates in question are interested in the activity of urban actors which lead to the formation of a this particular mechanism of cooperation, and con-urban regime theory presented in it are only of a signal nature. It is therefore limited to recalling its most important, constitutive components described in the monograph (cf. Glinka 2020, 40–49).

⁹ All the three issues are discussed in detail in the abovementioned monograph (Glinka 2020, 40–49).

¹⁰ C. Stone is a supporter of the extended interpretative variant (1993, 19–22; cf. Glinka 2020, 48).

¹¹ It does not mean that the official framework and forms of cooperation are not in the field of interest of the supporters of the theory. When a change of the city’s president (mayor) does not entail a change in the regime that has already been formed, they just lose their importance (Stoker, Mossberger 2001, 814).

sequently the constitution of a particular regime-type¹². Focusing on the subjective dimension of urban policy allows the analysis of the functioning of the local government community through the prism of voluntary and rational actions of the involved actors. It should be emphasised, however, that the emergence of the regime cannot be regarded as the “automatic” phase of development of modern cities. In other words, the balance of profits and losses resulting from a potential cooperation and a exchange of resources may prove unsatisfactory and actors operating at the local level will not make the effort to form a regime (cf. DeLeon 1992; Orr, Stoker 1994).

Methods and data

As already stated, an in-depth analysis of the urban regime is not an easy undertaking as it “escapes” traditional research schemes. This is due to many factors, among which the “multi-faceted” “multi-linear” and “multi-polar” processes at the level of modern cities seem to play a decisive role (Błaszczuk 2013, 13). The complexity of the structure created by the urban regime therefore justifies recalling one model (and thus intentionally simplified) example. What the author means when they discuss connections is a certain type of ideal (cf. Nowak 1977; Clarke, Primo 2007) which, being the reference point for the considerations presented later in the article, is difficult to associate with some strictly defined environmental context, be it historical, political, economic or socio-cultural (cf. George, Bennet 2005, 130).

Table 1. Urban regime actors – supposition approach

Urban regime actors according to sectors		
Public	Private	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ local government administration bodies (chosen in cyclical elections) ▪ city offices (bureaucrats/ office workers) ▪ local government organisational units ▪ municipal enterprises ▪ government administration bodies (out-of-office) ▪ central institutions (delegations) ▪ state-owned enterprises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ local enterprises ▪ representations (branches) of domestic and international enterprises ▪ local investors ▪ domestic and international investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ social organisations ▪ non-governmental organizations ▪ public benefit organizations ▪ natural persons (so-called leaders/local authorities) ▪ groups of residents (emerging <i>ad hoc</i>) ▪ representative of social movements

Source: author’s own compilation, cf. Glinka 2020, 40–42, 48–49.

According to the above assumption, an unspecified city (referred to as “X”) becomes a subject of analysis. Table 1 classifies those entities which, acting in the area of the city of X, are able to exert influence on the direction of local government processes. Impor-

¹² The most popular and the most frequently discussed typologies include: typologies of S. Elkin (federalist, pluralistic and developmental regime), G. Stoker and K. Mossberger (organic, instrumental and symbolic regime), D.L. Imbroscio (community-based, petty-bourgeois and locally etatistic) (see: Elkin 1987; Stoker, Mossberger 1994; Imbroscio 1998), Glinka 2020, 46–47; Glinka 2015a, 161–162. On the detailed typologies of urban regimes see: Glinka 2020, 45–48.

tantly, the list includes not only public and private entities, but also social actors. Therefore, it is part of the “extended” interpretation of the city regime. It should be emphasised that the author means here potentially existing entities and, as a result, their merely hypothetical impact on the course of local affairs.

The analysis of the above list (Table 1) suggests that the activity of public entities has a dominant significance (the catalogue of actors belonging to this group is by far the widest). Furthermore, it can be assumed that the activity of private and social actors, strengthened by their special environmental status, solidifies the scheme of tripartite cooperation. However, it is still not possible to determine which entities decide to cooperate under the regime and why they do. The exact number of the entities and their status is also unknown. There is also a lack of information about the resources of individual actors¹³. This issue is important because the resources determine the creation of a regime and its relatively stable (permanent) functioning, as they are a subject of exchanges conducted under the regime. As a result, it is difficult to point to the particular type of regime that could be formed in the city of X.

The attempts to clarify doubts presented above raise the question about the possibilities and limitations associated with the use of political science research instruments. An overview of selected but representative methodological approaches provides some hints how to study urban regimes, including the city of X (see Table 2).

Table 2. Research on urban regimes – overview of selected methodological approaches

Researcher(s)	Dominant research method(s)
Elkin (1987)	Case study (Dallas)
Stone (1989)	Case study (Atlanta)
DiGaetano, Klemanski (1993)	Comparative analysis
Stoker, Mossberger (1994)	Comparative analysis (cross-national comparative research)
Basset (1996)	Case study (Bristol)
John, Cole (1998)	Comparative analysis, case study (Leeds, Lille)
Sagan (2000)	Case study (Gdynia)
Swianiewicz, Klimska, Mielczarek (2004)	Case study (Warszawa)

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of: Elkin 1987; Stone 1989; DiGaetano, Klemanski, 1993; Stoker, Mossberger 1994; Basset 1996; John, Cole 1998; Sagan 2000; Swianiewicz, Klimska, Mielczarek 2004; cf. Glinka 2020, 46–47.

As the table above shows, case studies and comparative analysis are the dominant approaches to studying urban regimes. It is impossible to disagree with the statement that each of these approaches is based on the simultaneous use of a number of other, in a sense

13 It is difficult to clearly define the resources that are the subject of transactions between regime actors. The number of interpretative variants presented in the extensive literature is huge. Given the complex and time-changing environmental context determining the functioning of modern cities, one can only make a general statement that there is the exchange of all types of tangible and intangible products (derivatives) of the activities of the actors.

“minor” (“detailed”) research methods that allow to capture the specificity of the functioning of not only the cities themselves but, above all, urban actors. The reflection on these methods cannot be separated from a certain methodological canon established at the level of the discipline of political science (see Table 3)¹⁴.

Table 3. Typologies of research methods – overview of political science literature

Researcher(s)	Research methods
Krauz-Mozer, Ścigaj (2013)	comparative method, system analysis, survey, historical method, institutional and legal method, content analysis, decision analysis, monographic method, case study
Chodubski (2014)	system analysis, quantitative methods, qualitative methods, comparative method, institutional and legal analysis, historical method, behavioral method, simulation method, decision method, lexical method, geographical method, genealogical method, extrapolation method, reflection method, successive approximations method
Bäcker (2016)	qualitative research (ethnographic method, qualitative content analysis, discourse analysis, biographical method, grounded theory method); mixed research schemes; surveys; field research; observation, content analysis, narrative analysis, agenda-setting.
McNabb (2015)	quantitative approaches and methods (probing approach; survey approach; experimental approach; interpreting exploratory and descriptive statistics; nonparametric statistics; correlation and regression analysis; multivariate statistics), qualitative approaches and methods (case methods, historical methods; grounded theory methods; ethnographic research methods; critical approach; analysis of qualitative data; analysis of text, documents, artifacts;
Malici, Smith (2019)	comparative case study; field research; interview; critical and interpretive research; statistical research; survey; public policy evaluation; content analysis; experiment
Johnson, Reynolds, Mycoff (2019)	case study; content analysis; quantitative methods, qualitative methods

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of: Johnson, Reynolds, Mycoff 2019; Krauz-Mozer, Ścigaj, 2003; Chodubski 2004; McNabb 2015; Bäcker 2016; Malici, Smith 2019.

Apart from the differences between the numerous typologies presented in Table 3 and the fact that Table 3 does not list all the available methods (there are more¹⁵), one may be tempted to state that political scientists have the well-established and seemingly relatively homogeneous research instruments. The most frequently cited methods include: case study, comparative analysis, institutional and legal analysis, and diverse internally quantitative and quantitative methods. As demonstrated, some methods (case study and com-

14 Due to the limited scope of the article, the list does not cover a whole range of methodological proposals formulated in specialist magazines, such as “Political Science Research and Methods” and presented in numerous partial studies.

15 Process-tracing, classified by a significant proportion of researchers as a variant of case study and/or qualitative research, could be an example. A similar situation accompanies comparative research, which may be qualitative (Qualitative Comparative Analysis), quantitative (Quantitative Comparative Analysis) or mixed.

parative analysis) dominate urban regime study. Therefore, their utility does not require any verification. The author is interested, however, in the “less obvious” research method which, according to the adopted assumption, can be used to study the regime formed in the city of X.

The order in which the methods are discussed is not accidental and it follows from the assumption that the study of city X requires the application of a specific order, ranging from the most “general” to the most “detailed”. In other words, the lack of elementary data on the city of X (being a derivative of the adopted model) implies the logic of the “cascading” gradual analysis of the regime’s meanders. The pattern of exploring these includes:

1. Institutional and legal analysis.
2. Content analysis.
3. Decision analysis.
4. System analysis.
5. Network analysis.
6. Surveys.
7. Interview (free and/or structured).
8. Shadowing.

There is no doubt that the above catalog is internally diverse and may suggest associations with a methodological “eclecticism”. For example, while the first method is concerned with a classic institutional approach, the use of system analysis fits the assumptions of the behavioral trend (Antoszewski 2014, 35–36). Moreover, notably, most of them (institutional and legal analysis, content analysis, decision analysis, system analysis, surveys and interviews) are listed in Table 3. Thus, they can be labelled as “customary” methods, so commonly used by political scientists. On the other hand, network analysis and shadowing, although piquing the interest of social sciences representatives (this shall be explored later), they are not a part of this “customary” political science toolset (confirmed in Table 3).

Considering the above, the delimitation of the explanatory potential of all the eight methods in question requires one fundamental explanation. Not all of them must be applied in the study of urban regimes. Again, it is worth emphasising that the presented set is only a model proposal, taking into account the possibility of embedding conducted analyses within one specific research approach (institutional, behavioral, structural, constructivist, and so on). Thus this naturally limits the spectrum of methods involved in studying urban regimes. In addition, the presented proposal can, or should, be modified and reinterpreted, especially when considering the analysis of specific cases, and thus the complexity and diversity of the structure of each city.

Based on the belief that there is a certain environmental consensus on the ways of conducting political science research (as Table 3 shows), the article’s author demonstrates detailed characteristics of the eight specified methods. The key to their analysis, however, is to illustrate the possibilities and the limitations in the study of the regime formed in the city of X. Due to the logic of the gradual exploration of the functioning of the regime, the verified methods are divided into three groups.

Searching for a set of research methods

Group One

The aforementioned initial situation (the lack of elementary knowledge about the city of X) implies the need to recognise the fundamental elements and factors determining regime function.

The focus on the normative dimension of the functioning of the examined segment of the socio-political reality is a main, if not constitutive, distinguishing feature of institutional and legal analysis. Therefore, such strictly defined, formally (legally) oriented perspective, forces naturally regulations of public institutions and bodies, as well as formal (official) dependencies between them (Żebrowski 2012, 32). In case of the city of X, it is not only local, but national and international legal acts (referring to the broadly understood local government sphere) are a subject of interest. One should mention also internal regulations (the arrangement of relations within the structures formed by all types of organisations, regardless of whether they are about public or private entities.)

Legalism and, as a consequence, the “exterior” of the conducted research seem to be a disadvantage of this approach (Lownds 2006, 91). It is worth restating that with the urban regime theory, the relations between actors operating at the local level are primarily informal. In this sense, the institutional and legal analysis, focused only on the formal (official) framework of the local political system, i.e. public institutions and bodies, is not able to depict the entire “network” of local multilateral and complex connections. This analysis completely omits those actors who take the activity “on the sidelines” of the local political system but play, or may play, an important role in the functioning of the regime (e.g. local social, religious authorities, etc.).

The content analysis is the second, potentially useful method for studying the urban regime. Treated as a significant supplement, or rather an inherent development of institutional and legal analysis, it permits the construction and cataloguing the assumptions of various types of messages (Babbie 2007, 352; see: Wimmer, Dominick 2008). In the case in question, the messages include such legal acts and documents that reflect the variables of tripartite cooperation: all resolution acts, executive acts and internal documents, including protocols, transcripts, reports, forecasts, simulations, statements, calculations, etc (see: Bain 1983; Slapin, Proksch 2014). Urban strategies, programmes and plans, both general and sector-oriented, appear particularly valuable in terms of cognition. A literature review on the subject shows that the strategic documents outline a relatively wide group of urban actors involved in varying degrees in the course of local affairs.

Importantly, the multi-factor analysis of messages, based on a specific categorisation key as well as the coding and decoding procedure (cf. Babbie 2007, 350–362), allows the capturing of the way in which legislative and executive bodies (also regime actors) shape the systemic and functional framework of the decision-making process taking place in the city of X (discussed later in the article).

Similarly, as in the case of institutional and legal analysis, the explanatory potential of the second tested method is limited. There is no doubt that content analysis allows for a detailed view of the assumptions of the collected legal acts and documents, regardless of their rank, current status and the area of urban policy they are dedicated to. However, it is still unable to capture the whole range of informal connections that defy formal confir-

mation and classifications. This is due to its focus on “tangible” manifestations of the regime functioning. In this sense, the reconstruction of the multilateral dependencies of not only vertical but also horizontal nature is complex. Moreover, methodological dilemmas are further compounded by the unavailability of many potentially significant sources. The classified documentation in the possession of private actors (e.g. entrepreneurs) who operate in the city of X and may be important actors of the regime serve here as an example. Therefore, the use of content analysis, similarly to the institutional and legal analysis, may result in the “omission” of some key actors involved in cooperation under the regime.

The decision analysis, being the third verified method, allows for the reconstruction of the process of making various types of decisions that are made at the level of city X. The aforementioned reconstruction takes the form of a holistic, logical and internally coherent cause-effect sequence which illustrates not only the motivations, but also the consequences of the decisions in the field of researchers’ interest (cf. Raiffa 1986; Weinstein; Fineberg 1980; Howard 1980). In this sense, the conducted research takes the form of a detailed description of a specific decision situation (or decision problem) and the rational choices made by the involved decision makers (with particular emphasis on available decisions and their potential effects) (MacDonald 2003, 552; Walker; Schafer 2006, 4–6; see: Alison 1971; Steinbruner 1974; Sage 1990; Cashmann 1993). The research proceeding may also be normative in nature. In this case, the search for the so-called optimal decision treated as a model solution plays a key role.

Drawing on the achievements of the institutional and legal analysis as well as content analysis, decision analysis, treated as a classic political method, focuses on sources, mostly on legal acts and documents. Its potential to determine who, why and in what form rules in the city of X are made seems therefore to be severely limited. As stated, the presentation of the informal system of the connections and dependencies between actors operating at the local level is a key to recognise the patterns of the urban regime. Decision analysis, due to its essence, is not able to “capture” those actors, and consequently also those decisions that are not, at least, partially reflected in the available legal acts and documents.

A completely different research perspective accompanies the use of system analysis¹⁶. This already classic political science method, which draws on the rich and widely commented achievements of David Easton (1953; 1965a; 1965b), permits the perception of the political system as an internally complex structure which functioning is conditioned by the ability to adapt to the economic, social and cultural environment. The representatives of the system approach express the view that the essence of the research proceeding is to assess whether the system (and in the referred case, the political system of the city of X) is able to effectively and efficiently respond to the numerous problems and expectations (called demands) from its environment (cf. Scott 1972). The appropriate model reaction of the system can be sought in the decisions, programs and policies that, firstly, meet the needs and expectations formulated previously (the intra-systemic conversion) and, secondly, influence, as a feedback, the environment itself (conditioning the support given to the system) (Glinka 2020, 49–55).

There is no doubt that the city of X, irrespective of the specific development model of local government, can be perceived through the prism of the local political system functioning and its environment. The systemic approach, in contrast to the institutional and legal

¹⁶ The system analysis was the subject of the author’s considerations presented in detail in the aforementioned publication (see: Glinka 2020, 49–58).

analysis, content analysis and decision analysis, implicitly emphasises the importance of the activity of the wide range of urban actors. Therefore, it can be (cautiously) assumed that the system analysis “touches” the very heart of the urban regime.

However, the systemic approach does not reconstruct the complex system of the relations between individual actors – public, private and social- who when acting in city X, decide on informal cooperation. This is determined by the focus on the relationships observed on the line between the political system and the environment and not, as in the case of the urban regime theory, on the relationships between individual actors. Furthermore, unlike the theorists of the urban regime, Easton’s followers emphasise the importance of “tangible” manifestations of the system. They are, among others, mechanisms for articulating and agreeing the needs of the local government community, decisions, programs and urban policies, election decisions (results of local elections), and so on (Glinka 2020, 51–55).

Another, the use of network analysis (also known as social network analysis, or SNA) is the fifth variant of studying the urban regime¹⁷. SNA supporters assume that the functioning of each network (in this case, the network is the city of X) is based on the interactions between its individual elements (it can be assumed that they are actors operating in its area). The decision to use network analysis has certain consequences for the organisation of the research proceeding. First of all, the key role is played not only by determining the measures illustrating the frequency of interactions between network elements. Secondly, capturing the characteristics of these interactions, such as centrality, reciprocity and closeness, is considered equally important (Glinka 2015b, 250–254; cf. Wassermann, Faust 1994; Cross, Parker 2004; Durland, Fredericks 2005; Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, Labianca 2009; Mützel 2009; Żukiewicz, Zieliński and Domagała 2018).

Bearing in mind some objective difficulties related to the access to data (and such difficulties undoubtedly accompany the study of the city of X regime), it should be stated that the skilful use of the network analysis is not an easy task. This, in turn, means that the classic SNA variant (based on a quantitative approach) must often be supplemented by a qualitative analysis (the so-called mixed approach). This is particularly important in a situation where the aim of the study is to depict the dynamics and directions of interaction of network elements, the type of resources that circulate within it and the types of used communication channels. The way of perceiving social relations is definitely the “contact” point of the network analysis and the urban regime theory. In both cases, the relations are horizontal, informal and unstructured. This, in turn, forces to treat the units in question, respectively, the network elements (SNA) and actors (the urban regime theory) as non-autonomous, thus subject to constant environmental impact, units (Glinka 2015b, 250–254)

It seems that the effectiveness of SNA, defined through the prism of implementing the urban regime theory, results from the use of the already mentioned mixed approach. It is the qualitative dimension of the conducted research proceeding that allows, as will be proven later in the article, to “capture” such urban actors and their actions that cannot be simply and clearly classified.

17 On the SNA see more: Glinka 2015b, 250–263.

Group Two

According to the adopted assumption, survey is the sixth verified method. Regardless of the variant of the survey (see: Brady 2000; Holbrook, Green, Krosnick 2003; Stephenson, Crete 2011; Fleming, Bowden 2009), it is important as it permits the collection of information of key importance for regime analysis. The use of surveys may be particularly important in a situation where the research proceeding encounters, in a sense, “natural” limitations in the form of the lack of or small (insufficient) number of data. Importantly, legal acts and documents are not a source of this data, as in the case of the methods classified in the so-called group one.

The usefulness of the survey results from the fact that it enables the reconstruction of the catalogue of the actors involved in the functioning of the regime. It is based on the respondents’ answers, or their judgments about what entities decide on tripartite cooperation. It does not mean that using the survey is not at risk of error. On the contrary, the possibility of incorrect (missing or insufficient) sample selection should be considered. It is also difficult to avoid such indications of the respondents, resulting from the lack of knowledge or other personal motivations, may reduce the reliability and accuracy of the measurement (cf. Szafran 2014).

Nevertheless, it is notable that the survey can determine the main “track” of the search for actors of the regime and, relatively, the motivations and forms of cooperation that accompany them. Much also depends on the structure of the questionnaire and the formulation of the questions (Krok 2015, 59–70). A questionnaire containing a series of open questions is an often used solution. On the basis of the questions, respondents express their opinions on the process of local governance, including urban actors’ role. A set of ranking questions should be considered a different option. In such case, the respondent’s task is to number the answers (and thus to set their hierarchy) based on a clearly defined criterion. It is not difficult to imagine a situation in which the respondent ranks the actors of the city of X according to the assessment of their influence on the course of local affairs.

The chance to obtain additional or “extra” data is another element that demonstrates the usefulness of the survey as a method of studying urban regimes. It happens when the questionnaire allows for the possibility of placing such information which the respondent considers to be particularly important and which is unable to choose from the available options. The indications regarding actors taking up activities in the city of X can serve as an example.

There is no doubt that the data collected as part of the survey require appropriate systematization and elaboration, especially when considering the unlimited number of questions that may be addressed to city residents. This issue is important as due to the reliable data analysis, it is possible to assess the true power in cities: the executive and legislative bodies elected in local elections, or the entities whose activity does not fit the official (formal) governance process at local level¹⁸.

¹⁸ As mentioned earlier, a lot depends on the organization of the study, i.e. the selection of the sample or the construction of the questionnaire.

Group Three

Conducting a survey which, due to the numerous quantitative and qualitative limitations related to the construction of the questionnaire, cannot, however, be the source of all the relevant information on the regime's functions, requires some customisation and development. It is the interview method (see: Leech 2002; Mosley 2003). The criterion for selecting interview participants is unequivocal in this case. These are the results of the previous survey showing who plays a decisive role in the local decision-making process. Regardless of whether it is structured or free interview, it is an important source of knowledge about regime actors and, what is worth emphasizing, the motivations underlying their involvement. Furthermore, interviewees' statements may set new research leads: for example, they may indicate the importance of such regime actors who are hardly to be found among the respondents answering the questions included in the survey.

Therefore, it seems that the interview method, through direct contact with actors operating in the city of X, is able to provide answers to questions about the real mechanisms of the regime functioning¹⁹. The use of interviews, as in the case of other methods, however, has limitations. Next to the substantive value of the recorded statements (they can be discussed), the attention is also paid to the objective difficulties associated with convincing urban actors to participate in the study. It is not difficult to imagine a stalemate in which the entities operating in the city of X are not interested in the researchers' requests and react negatively to their invitation. As it is proven by the numerous examples of interview-based research, the percentage of positive responses to invitations cannot be considered as high and satisfactory.

The use of the shadowing method seems to be a positive, though not without flaws, solution to the difficulties associated with conducting surveys and interviews. Due to its nature, it is successfully used not only in scientific research, but also in business organisations and public institutions. The potential of shadowing results from the broadly understood observation of the actions taken by entities that are in the researcher's field of interest (see: McDonald 2005; Quinlan 2008). In the analysed case, they are actors who are active in the city of X. This observation can take various forms, ranging from direct, passive participation in the activities of actors, and ending with "tracking" all types of material and non-material products of their work. In the second case, the attention can therefore focus not only on specific decisions and actions (e.g. transactions, travels), but also on all types of verbal and non-verbal statements and announcements presented by the participants of tripartite cooperation.

The effectiveness of shadowing as a method of studying the urban regime is subject to certain conditions. The possibility of reaching and "tracking" the actors' activity (in some cases it may be difficult or impossible) should be considered the first condition. Some kind of reliability and multidimensionality of the observation is the second key condition (cf. Ferguson 2006). Remembering that not only public but also private and social actors are the subject of researchers' interest, one should be aware that the products of their activities can be dramatically different. This raises specific duties on the researcher's side, primarily in the field of skilful cataloguing and analysis.

19 Free (narrative) as well as semi-structured interview, compared to structured interview, allows the research participants to express much more uncontrolled, open-minded statements (see: Edwards, Holland 2003).

Conclusions

Due to the complexity and multidimensionality of the urban regime, exploring the patterns of its functioning is not simple. It is determined by two types of conditions. The specificity of the urban regime should be considered the first and seemingly absolutely basic factor. It has been demonstrated that it creates a structure, based on the complex cooperation of public, private and social entities. The necessity of choosing research methods in an optimal, i.e. as complete as possible, way illustrate the essence of this tripartite cooperation is the second equally important, perhaps more important, factor. It should be emphasised that the cooperation is primarily of an informal nature, thus “escaping” the notions and classifications repeated in the extensive literature on the subject.

In accordance with the adopted assumption, the use of the eight analysed methods fits a logical, gradual pattern of “reaching” the answers for the questions of who, why and in what form rules in the city of X. Diagram 1 is a graphic illustration of this scheme.

Diagram 1. Research methods of the urban regime – brief summary



Source: Author's own compilation.

It is difficult to disagree with the statement that the presented set of methods is not the only, closed and, thus, the final variant of examining the urban regime. It was not the author's intention. Moreover, as it has already been emphasised, not all of the mentioned methods must meet the interest of political scientists. Despite some objective and therefore openly signalled restrictions, the presented set allows the author to formulate at least few conclusions.

First of all, the attention is paid to a kind of “discrepancy” between the specificity of the functioning of the urban regime and the explanatory potential of the political science research instruments. In a situation where the informal mechanisms of the cooperation of urban actors become the subject of interest, a significant part of this instrumentation becomes ineffective. The reason is connected with the difficulties associated with collecting this information which turns out to be crucial to capture the complex cooperation of public, private and social entities. It does not mean that political scientists are not able to study the urban regime. On the contrary, the extensive literature abounds in the examples of analyses that successfully recognise regime actors, characterise their motivations and draw conclusions concerning the type of the formed structure. As demonstrated in the article, studies on city regimes, however, “force” the extension of political science research tools. Therefore, the methods of gaining popularity among representatives of the discipline should be considered useful. These are network analysis and shadowing. Each of them is characterised with high potential for exploring the informal forms of cooperation of the triad of urban actors and sets a new perspective on the city and the urban regime. The first method (SNA) treats the city regime as an internally complex network based on interactions in the horizontal system and not, as in the case of institutional interpretations, in the classic vertical system. The second method (shadowing) arises from the belief that the analysis of the functioning of the urban regime requires a kind of tangible, in a sense anthropological “rapprochement” with the manifestations and products of the activity of urban actors. Thus, both methods appear to be a kind of “natural” development or the extension of the tools within the reach of political scientists.

Secondly, the analysis of the possibility of examining the regime formed in city X, presented in the article, raises the question of practical verification of an eight-element set of research methods (assuming that not all of them must be used). In this sense, the consideration of the variants of “determining” who, why and how rules in the city of X sets the further and, as it seems, desirable direction of research on the functioning of urban communities. It is interesting to ask whether the set of methods presented in the article can be used to the same extent by, on the one hand, researchers of consolidated democracies e.g. Western European ones and, on the other hand, by the researchers of the countries that are just undergoing the hardships of systemic transformation. The same question seems no less valuable in a situation where one analyses the cities which are, on the one hand, economically monocultural and social, and on the other, characterized by advanced pluralism. The field of “testing” the usability of the discussed methods is therefore wide.

Considering the above, it can be concluded that the analysis presented in the article allows for a positive verification of the hypothesis, according to which the explanatory potential of the urban regime theory is a derivative of the possibility of using a specific set of research methods, not only those that are in the “customary” (traditional) interest of political scientists. There are at least two elements that justify it. First of all, it is difficult to disagree with the statement that the study of the urban regime cannot be based on the use of one selected research method, even when it is a case study or comparative analysis. It seems to be a requirement to reach out for at least a few of them, though, as it has already been mentioned before, it does not have to be a full eight-element set. Secondly, it is worthy to highlight the usefulness of the “unusual” methods which, as proven, touch the very essence of the urban regime in the form of the informal cooperation of the involved

actors. In this sense, they enrich the arrangements made using traditional political science instruments.

The positive verification of the hypothesis creates an interesting perspective for the development of research on urban regimes. Based on the need for some kind of methodological “openness”, one may be tempted to cautiously state that these studies will be able to anticipate numerous, not fully controlled transformations and processes occurring at the level of modern cities, initiated and implemented by local actors.

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