

Kielce, 11.09.2023

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Summary of the doctoral dissertation entitled: “The Role of Local Governments in Attaining Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in Poland and Sweden - a comparative analysis”

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This doctoral dissertation is a theoretical and empirical study in the discipline of political science. The subject matter of this dissertation is a comparative study of the local government’s activities to achieve equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities in Poland and Sweden on the local level. The term equalization of opportunities is understood as the process through which various services, activities, and information are made available to persons with disabilities.

The main objective of this dissertation is to examine how the political systems of Poland and Sweden meet the needs of persons with disabilities on the local level. Therefore, the research sets out to answer the following main question: What factors make the Swedish system more efficient? This examination also leads to identifying good practices and formulating recommendations.

Six research hypotheses were identified. The general one states that the Polish and Swedish standards of protection of persons with disabilities are similar, but there is a main difference in the process of application of these standards. The second hypothesis assumes that the procedure of obtaining the right to benefits by persons with disabilities in Poland is to a greater extent more formalized than in Sweden, limiting access to services offered by the local government. The third suggests that legal provisions on the rights of persons with disabilities in Poland are dispersed in dozens of legal acts which makes them less accessible. The third one indicates that the complex system of financing social protection for persons with disabilities in Poland and inadequate funding impair

the access of persons with disabilities to social protection offered by the local governments. The fourth one maintains that Sweden is a country where the system of social protection for persons with disabilities is a comprehensive one. Additionally, local governments have a lot of autonomy in the implementation of social programs. The last hypothesis implies that the number of beneficiaries of social services in Sweden, in proportion to the population, is much higher than in Poland.

The dissertation consists of four chapters. The first chapter is a theoretical introduction. It clarifies the concept of disability in a broader international context and explains the concept of equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities and the role of local government in the implementation of social policy towards people with disabilities. The second part focuses on the institutional and legal instruments that protect persons with disabilities adopted in Poland and Sweden. Thus, independent variables are distinguished. The third chapter concentrates on local governments in Poland and Sweden and their performance in the field of providing social services to persons with disabilities. This chapter identifies independent and dependent variables showing the effects of local government's undertakings. Finally, the last chapter, an empirical one, shows the outcome of local government performance in delivering social services. Therefore, it compares the statistical data showing the use of the main form of support to persons with disabilities offered by local governments. This data shows the number of beneficiaries.

The dissertation concludes that although the Polish and Swedish standards of protection of persons with disabilities are similar, there is a main difference in the process of application of these standards. The local governments in Poland have a major problem in delivering social services to equalize opportunities for people with disabilities due to formal and financial obstacles. Data confirms that among persons with disabilities, the share of beneficiaries of social programs offered by the local governments is ten times lower in Poland than in Sweden.

Keywords: people with disabilities, equalizing opportunities, self-government, Poland, Sweden