

Regional development and quality of democracy in V4 countries

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Abstract: The paper focuses on a cross-sectional examination of regional development in Visegrad Four countries (Czechia, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia) to identify any associations between regional development (understood as socioeconomic development and measured by the size of regional GDP) and selected indicators of quality of democracy. First, we systematically mapped the long-term patterns of GDP in V4 countries between 2000 and 2022. Second, we focused on differences in regional GDP and transformations of its patterns in time and space. Third, we analysed the associations between regional GDP and three dimensions of quality of democracy: (1) participation; (2) representation; and (3) competition. In accordance with the theoretical framework anchored in the procedural concept of democracy, the analysis focuses especially on the role of institutions and inter-institutional relations. In this respect, we adopt the perspective of new institutionalism (March & Olsen, 1989; North, 1990; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), which is based on two assumptions: (1) 'institutions matter' because they affect norms, and beliefs, actions and, in turn, outputs; and (2) 'institutions are endogenous', thus their form of functioning depends on the conditions under which they were created, and which perpetuate them (Przeworski, 2004). New institutionalism considers different institutional settings as the cause of different political outcomes (March & Olsen, 1984) and the continuity of social institutions as a factor connecting past and present. Therefore, understanding institutions' current form and performance requires an analysis of the development of institutions over a longer time horizon (North, 1990: vii). In this respect, the paper can contribute also to formulation of some policy implications, with regard to whether or how the different institutional settings can affect regional development and quality of democracy.