Introduction

A book that is offered to the readers is the result of research on different fields of public participation and democracy. The research has been conducted by the Department of Sociology at The Academy of Business in Dąbrowa Górnicza for several years.

Public participation, civil commitment and activity – these are connected with each other but not identical, social and political problems of contemporary Poland. They result from the characteristics of Polish democracy that is still being shaped and that is looking for the best solutions for itself. We are used to complaining and announcing negative assessments, which very often can be heard in public debates, scientific expertise and journalistic comments revealing that Polish people live their own private lives and that they do not care about a public sphere. What is the source of the Poles’ weak involvement in social and political lives? There is also the reverse side of the phenomenon. Sociologists and political scientists very carefully watch the public activity, which is often expressed in the form of opposition movements. It does not mean that there is the lack of positive activities performed by citizens but the activities are not very spectacular and they do not exist in media.

Our reflection on the public participation, which is expressed in this publication, meets also the following question: What is currently going on in the world, in Poland, especially at the local and regional levels. In this scientific work the locality and the regionalism constitute the starting point. We think that in the case of an interesting for us topic, the majority of cases start at this level. The debate on the civil society condition, the quality of a civil dialogue, a problem of political representation, imperfection of Polish self-governance, a problem of centralization and de-centralization, the beginning of social movements being constituted as the opposition ones, demanding greater political representation and rights by cultural and eth-

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nic minorities – these are some of the contemporary societies’ problems, including the society of Poland. These problems have local and regional nature. In the book offered to the readers, we try to analyze the public participation problem in the context of the governance\(^2\). In other words, in the majority of texts collected in this volume, the following questions: “How should the public activity be managed and how should it be used as the element of the governance, negotiated and participative democracy” appear. We are convinced that the category of governance is important because thanks to application of the solutions resulting from this category, we will be able to talk about a civil society in the full sense of this word. Thus, this is the situation when citizens, not only implement their particular and group objections but also they take commitment and responsibility, which are connected with making decisions concerning the whole community or society. Such a model of a civil society and public participation constitute a very important present day challenge, probably one of the most important.

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We hope that his book will be interesting for those who deal with the problems of the citizens’ participation in social and political lives, especially at the regional and local levels. We encourage reading the book by those who are interested in citizens’ participation problems and problems of democracy.

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