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Summary of the doctoral dissertation.

Topic: “Infectious diseases and its eradication in the Silesian Voivodeship between 1922 and 1939.”

The topic of my doctoral thesis is infectious diseases and its eradication in the Silesian Voivodeship between 1922 and 1939. The problem of infectious diseases in the Polish area of Upper Silesia in the interwar periods covers a vast area of topics dealing with reorganization of the state structure including medical staff, as well as the sole functioning of the social institutions supporting the authorities' actions. That is why the main goal of this study is to look at the fight with infectious diseases in the period of 1920's and 1930's as a part of Poland's process of reconstruction.

The main sources of the thesis are the materials from the National Archive in Katowice. Other sources that contributed to the thesis were the information and statistical data available also in other branches of the National Archives – among them in Cieszyn, Pszczyna, Racibórz and Bielsko-Biała. Materials that are available in the National Archive in Katowice can be characterized by its irregularity and diversity.

The thesis is divided into four chapters within which a comprehensive and incisive statistical analysis of the morbidity for each infectious disease was conducted. The analysis also included the condition and the development of epidemic treatment in the Silesian Voivodeship. The period of the study covers mainly the period between 1922 and 1939. The depth of the research study and the lack of satisfying data concerning the infectious diseases treatment allows one to elaborate on issues which the author finds crucial for the proper analysis of the health and morbidity rate in the area of Upper Silesia and Cieszyn Silesia. That, on the other hand, entails the need to marginalize other aspects of the discussed topic. As a result, the vast part of the work focuses on tuberculosis as a statistically dominant disease in each city of the Silesian Voivodeship.

The first chapter focuses on the fight against infectious diseases in the Silesian Voivodeship in the years 1922-1939. The problem of health was the most prioritized issue back then, especially within big cities due to its industrial character. A low level of hygienic culture that was still visible among people caused the spread of infectious diseases such as typhoid, diphtheria, scarlet fever, dysentery, trachoma, or smallpox. The biggest amount of diseases occurred among young people between the age of 20 and 30. Also a legal deviation of society with regards to eradicating infectious diseases was presented. In the first few years of the health system service during the Polish reigns one cannot notice major changes in the Silesian Voivodeship, especially within the area of medical legislation still acting under German or Austrian regulations.

The second chapter presents the health service within the area of Silesian Voivodeship in the interwar period, its organization and its objectives to eradicate infectious diseases. The hospital care within the area of infectious diseases in the 1920's was not well developed. The beginnings of the 1930's did not present itself well, not only for the Upper Silesian hospitals, but also hospitals in Poland in general. Its cause was the economic crisis that began in 1930. It was also a period of increased level of various infectious diseases. In the second part of the 1930's hospital management in Upper Silesian Voivodeship appeared to be improved. What is more, the upturn of the number of doctors was noticed. Local doctors supervised the hygienic state of each territory. Sanitary propaganda was initiated among people by means of mandatory vaccines against diphtheria, scarlet fever and smallpox.

Epidemic hospital management will be also compared in terms of the number of beds, doctors, or the general state of the hospitals in the cities of the Upper Silesia to other cities in Poland (including Poznań). Poznań, while being under the reign of Germany was in the same social-political situation as the cities of the Upper Silesia. Another comparison will be conducted regarding then Silesian, Poznanian, Pomeranian, Krakowian voivodeship and a coal district of Dąbrowa.

Venereal diseases in the Silesian voivodeship in the period between 1922 and 1939 were described in the third chapter. It is necessary to point out that the part of the thesis regarding venereal deceases also includes the issue of prostitution. It is not only due to the low number of data concerning morbidity rate and the number of patients being under the medical care, but also the characteristic belief of that period that the decease relates directly to prostitution.

The last fourth chapter focuses on the fight against tuberculosis in the Silesian voivodeship in the interwar period. The available statistical comparison that can be found in the archives of each city include different social groups as well as different types of tuberculosis in the limited area. The chapter presents the collected statistics of morbidity and eradication of tuberculosis. Comparison of sick people in the Upper Silesia and Cieszyn Silesia to other voivodeships and cities will also be conducted.

In this chapter I take a closer look at the history of the research on tuberculosis and its etiology. Tuberculosis was not only described as a social disease, but also as an infectious one which resulted in the increased rates of morbidity and mortality, especially with regards to pulmonary tuberculosis. The disease was also associated with the living conditions, a lifestyle, eating habits and working conditions. In the discussed period in the Upper Silesia, similarly to the western countries, tuberculosis was treated by means of symptomatic-preservative (climatic and dietary treatment) and invasive (emphysema and thoracoplasty) methods. In this part of the thesis legal bases for fighting tuberculosis and the institutions trying to counteract the disease have been discussed. The fight against tuberculosis was conducted by both The Second Republic of Poland and the Silesian voivodeship in the similar way by organizing: social campaigns, anti-tuberculosis days (initiated years later in Upper Silesia) and anti-tuberculosis clinics. Due to the low funds anti-tuberculosis actions were reduced to readings, chats or film presentations.

To sum up, the problem of fighting infectious diseases in the interwar period in the Upper Silesia allows one to look at the slow development of the structure of the public health service. It also points out society's actions connected with prevention, such as health-promoting education, prophylaxis and promotive actions. The scale of the occurrence of the infectious diseases did not allow one to ignore them, thus despite the financial problems resulting from the necessity of the reconstruction of different aspects of the country and the economic crisis forces to take actions related to its eradication. The fight against infectious diseases became a catalyst for changes within the range of legal regulations and institutional solutions related not only to healthcare, but also to urban nature. The issue of infectious diseases in the interwar period was considered to be a social problem which required a holistic approach to solving it.