
Section 4.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LOCALITY

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LOCAL PARTNERSHIP FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – NEW CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN POLAND

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to describe and evaluate the public partnerships which are created mostly for supporting economic development of a given region.

The main thesis is that the systemic transformation in Poland contributed to the re-development of self-government; the structure of local government in Poland, from the formal and legal perspective, is coherent; after almost two decades of the functioning of local government, some questions about its future have arisen. It seems that other, external entities should be increasingly incorporated into management structures in order to improve and rationalise the process of public decision-making.

Key words: *local government, local partnership, economic development, local development*

1. Introduction

The system transformation in Poland has contributed to re-establishing local authorities. In the course of decentralisation reforms it was realised that building a centralised administrative model does no good service to the state and may even foster its dysfunction. Rightly, it was also concluded that a lack of civil participation in public affairs and the alienation of power elites lie at the heart of structural crisis [1, p. 7].

Local authorities assumed a key role in this process. Legally and formally their structure in Poland is quite coherent. Municipal, county and regional governments are seen, despite some reservations about the division of powers and income generation methods, as important units of public administration [9, pp. 7-8].¹

¹ There are many received translations of Polish administrative units; this text for the sake of coherence with the EU documentation follows the translation suggested by

On the 8th of March 1990 the Act on Municipalities was passed, which gave rise to the re-emergence of local government in Poland, and at the same time constituted the first step towards further reforms crowned by establishing county and regional governments. On the 1st of January 1999 a three-tier territorial state division was introduced and the municipality, county and region were named its main units. Thus, the reform undoubtedly reinforced state structures within which the civil factor plays an important role.

However, after over two decades of the existence of local and regional governments, numerous questions about their future have arisen. It is clear that the static formula of local governing is wearing thin. It seems that other, external entities need to participate in the governing structures with more intensity, with a view to streamlining and rationalising the public decision-making process, directly translating into the economic development of a given region. The concept of public management is a response to this demand.

2. Public management

Civil democracy is one of the pillars of the system in the Third Republic of Poland. As is commonly believed, the essence of civic democracy is best captured on the local-government level, which is not penetrated by the state's omnipotence and which is a self-defence system shielding society from the bureaucracy of a centralised state [11, p. 8].

Governance is a wide term and its ambiguity continuously grows. It can be understood, *inter alia*, as corporate governance, new public management, good governance or inter-firm governance [16, pp. 45-46]. However, it is particularly important to refer to the concept of governance in the local context. Such an approach brings us closer to the concept of new public management, which is based on cooperation among public administration, citizens, non-governmental organisations and representatives of the commercial sector within a given area [3, pp. 13-60].

According to traditional thinking, role division in a society is clearly defined. So, local government, with its constitutional position, its powers and development capacity, governs within a specific area and discharges

the Committee of Regions: the smallest unit *gmina* – municipality, *powiat* – county and the biggest unit *województwo* – region [translator's annotation].

public duties. Entrepreneurs are profit-driven and it is good if they are guided by the principles of business ethics in their activities. They have significant financial capital at their disposal and their economic expertise is of great value. Organisations bringing together entrepreneurs are responsible for representing their interests before both central and local authorities [8, pp. 30-38]. Non-governmental organisations focus their activity on solving specific social problems [13, pp. 143-166]. While they do not have sufficient financial resources, their creativity and mobility may be their chief asset.

Governance involves managing complex societies through coordinating the activities of entities belonging to various sectors. The same definition can apply to public governance. As Hubert Izdebski points out, such public governance which is not within the exclusive purview of the public authorities implies a departure from perceiving citizens as voters, volunteers or consumers alone, and the beginning of seeing them as investors and – as they are asked to offer solutions to the problems of their concern – co-decision-makers and co-creators of a common good [5, p. 33].

The idea of partnership, which fully reflects the principles of the above-mentioned concept, is undoubtedly an instrument which makes it possible to build a multi-level system of public governance. It has been implemented for many years in western states and also, which cannot be stressed enough, in Poland for some years. The modest attempt to form partnerships of different kinds, local partnerships in particular, shows that there is a genuine need to spread this method of public governance and to lay down some special guidelines on its efficiency.

3. Local partnership

The term local partnership appears increasingly often in publications on the development and promotion of local social and economic communities and local development. Around the world and in Europe, there are many ways of partnership cooperation between entities carrying out various tasks [7, pp. 111-142].

For the first time the concept of local partnership became a matter for public debate in the mid-1980s in Anglo-Saxon countries, as the idea of the cooperation of many entities for local development appeared there earliest. It was a consequence of an attempt at solving the numerous socio-economic problems afflicting those countries (mainly Great Brit-

ain) in the late 1980s, following a restructuring process in the local economies.

It was then that the classic methods of problem resolution (support offered to citizens or enterprises by one institution, e.g. unemployment benefit) proved insufficient to deal efficiently with those problems. Therefore, the search for new social problem-solving methods began, whereby various institutions would be largely engaged in eliminating problems. In their initial stage, partnership initiatives generally took the form of medium or short-term, public-private partnerships entered into by the local public sector and a local business [14, p. 9].

Thereafter, the role, form and activities in the area of local partnership initiatives underwent changes. As the structures for the future European Union developed, the idea of the purpose behind local partnerships evolved, too. Local partnership groups tasked themselves with activities intended to acquire aid funds earmarked for the implementation of various projects. Afterwards, the idea of local partnership changed significantly and started to be seen as a multidimensional and cross-sector factor, and a mechanism for promoting local development [6, pp. 33-39].

The term local partnership was never given an unambiguous official definition. Mainly, this is a result of the growing complexity and diversity of the forms of partnerships. The following definition of a partnership could be adopted: it is a platform for cooperation between various partners who – together in a consistent and sustainable way, and through innovative methods and means – plan, design, implement and execute specific actions and initiatives. Their purpose is to develop the local socio-economic community and to build a local identity among the members of that community.

Forming a local partnership is by no means easy, as it requires full engagement from all parties bound by the agreement. In Poland, where building a civic society has been attempted for over two decades, it is particularly difficult and – as yet – the potential locked within the local partnership has hardly been exploited.

4. Principles for local partnership

The idea of partnership is an optimal direction for local politics to take. Jules Pretty, a British scientist and sustainability practitioner, author of the theory of sustainable local capital, singled out six areas/resources – both

material and immaterial – found or created by human communities inhabiting a determined area. They include:

- **physical capital:** infrastructure, transport system, telecommunications network;
- **social capital:** cooperation, social bonding, social activity, organisations and institutions;
- **human capital:** education, qualifications and experience, workforce structure, social skills and adaptability;
- **financial capital:** incomes, own resources, public funds, subsidies, grants, welfare payments;
- **natural capital:** natural resources, environmental conditions, landform features;
- **intellectual capital:** know-how, knowledge and experience of executing specific socio-economic undertakings.

Resources understood in that way represent local capital, which may determine the strength of a local community (for instance, interesting environmental assets providing base for agritourism). However, shortcomings in one of the areas may trigger other difficulties (for instance, poor public transport and road infrastructure hinder commuting to work or school). Full awareness of assets and shortcomings is an important element when forming a partnership. While working towards a community's development, the partnership will naturally use its resources. It is also a significant factor in identifying local problems [2].

It is also difficult to indicate a list of entities which should create local partnerships. Often, a long enumeration of prospective participants includes: public employment services, social welfare institutions, other entities of public administration, nongovernmental organisations, business and employer organisations, private businesses, trade unions, training institutions, employment agencies, religious organisations and associations, local media, schools and universities, scientific research units [2]. It is worth mentioning that potential co-operators in a local partnership should encompass three sectors; public, economic and social.

Importantly, the scope of entities falling within particular sectors is quite broad, but not indiscriminate, as each of them has a different legal capacity, range of powers, experience and purpose, as well as material and immaterial resources. The essence of a partnership is bringing together various entities so that each of them contributes substantially to an emerging project, offering their competency and sense of responsibility.

The right selection of partners is one of the key issues at the outset of the process. It may happen that some of the partners involved are not adequate and their actions disadvantage the venture. A partnership member is a person with a certain set of characteristics. It is assumed that a partnership should welcome most active and effective people characterised by certain features. A person who would be greatly sought-after in a project should exhibit the following features:

- the ability to define the needs and aims of local development, in particular, a precise vision of the global development of local structures or their development in some specific areas;
- the ability to represent interests relevant for the local community even when they are institutionalised;
- the ability to represent institutions or organisations important for the local community;
- adequate decision-making power and access to right resources including capital, material and immaterial resources, competency, energy, contacts and connections necessary when implementing actions undertaken as a result of a previous assessment of the partners' needs;
- certain personality traits such as cooperativeness, penchant for thinking and acting on a bigger scale than out of self-interest alone, curiosity and motivation to act for the local community, optimism and humour, skills in defusing tensions and solving problems [4].

A partnership is not created through a revolution. It should be based on a series of systematic measures whose order and significance is not coincidental. Stages of partnership-building include:

- 1) **scoping** – understanding the challenge, gathering information, consultation with partners and external resource suppliers, building a partnership vision;
- 2) **identifying** – identifying prospective partners and – if they are suitable – ensuring their participation, motivating and encouraging them to further cooperation;
- 3) **building** – partners build their working relationship through setting common goals, tasks and basic principles for their partnership;
- 4) **planning** – partners develop an action plan and start to draw up a common project;
- 5) **managing** – partners build framework and management for their medium- and long-term partnership;
- 6) **resource procurement** – partners (and other supporters) identify and mobilise financial and non-financial resources;

- 7) **implementing** – working according to a schedule; it is recommended to establish a contingency plan (once the resources are acquired and the project is agreed on in detail);
- 8) **monitoring** – measuring and reporting on the influence and effectiveness of the results i.e. whether the partnership is meeting its objectives;
- 9) **structural review** – reviewing the partnership: how does the partnership influence the partners? Is it a good time for some members to leave the partnership or/and bring some new members into the partnership;
- 10) **revising** – revising the partnership, the action plan and project
- 11) **institutionalising** – building a proper framework and mechanisms for the partnership to ensure long-term agreement and continuity;
- 12) **continuing or terminating the partnership** – creating a solid and durable framework or terminating the cooperation by all partners [17, p. 25].

Attempting at defining the scope of activities within which local partnerships operate in Poland, one would have to indicate four more areas: the labour market and the economy, infrastructure and education. Regardless of this typology, most partnerships are intended to revive a local economy, which in turn helps local communities to systematically stimulate economic development and create new jobs with the active participation of the citizens. It makes it possible to develop projects – economic programmes – which are based on local resources and problems and needs analyses, and whose implementation will contribute to the economic revival of a region, county or municipality and to job creation for the citizens. Therefore, local economic development is a long-run process which takes place in an economy in a given area. It encompasses changes in production, employment, investments, capital, incomes, population, consumption, etc. The process is predicted, planned and implemented by the public and private sectors, the local government and the local community. In the course of the process it is crucial to fully use human and natural resources in order to create employment and ensure citizen welfare. Local economic development should be stimulated by local governments. It is the authorities' obligation to further local entrepreneurs, attract new investors, enhance citizens' qualifications including life-long learning, and create conditions for regular contact between the public and the private sector. However, the duty to preserve the cultural legacy for future generations and to protect the natural environment cannot be overlooked. Therefore, the development should be sustainable.

5. Conclusion

In concluding the above-mentioned considerations, it is worth referring to studies on the functioning of partnerships in Poland. It transpires that they are relatively well-acquainted with, and can assess their social, economic and natural environment. Natural heritage is perceived particularly well, and is treated as a development opportunity, or even as a basic developmental driving force. Socio-economic potential in the area of partnership activity is also highly valued. Local partnerships in Poland operate in an unusually wide area of activities, which has its advantages and disadvantages. An open attitude to economic and social problem solving is a strength, while the drawbacks include indistinct activities and chaotic attempts at solving various problems at a time, which is often curbed by the limited resources (human and material) of partnerships [10, pp. 4-5].

A typical characteristic of local partnerships in Poland is their variety of activities; ranging from one-day events to periodic events, from international conferences, through to local talks, to meetings and debates in rural areas, from periodic publications, to one-off publications, to setting and running websites. Most partnerships also issue strategic documents, often as an alternative to the planning that was monopolistically imposed by local governments and regional authorities. Those documents are of multidimensional and cross-sectoral nature, and this might well best prove the potential therein. Local partnerships also play an important role in creating and developing human capital. They undertake complex educational and consulting activities often finding support in cooperation with specialised research and education centres and, if necessary, in local teaching staff [10, pp. 6-7].

The benefits yielded through local partnerships are numerous, and they can be categorised according to their beneficiaries:

- **for a local community:**
 - integrating a local community;
 - activating local leaders from all walks of life;
 - increasing citizen participation in the development of a municipality, county, region;
 - creating jobs based on local resources;
 - contributing to creating local economic organisations or strengthening already-existing ones;
 - strengthening and integrating the economic environment;

- spreading knowledge about the principles for local development;
- winning local social support for economic projects;
- reintroducing them successfully every two or three years since they are repeatable;
- developing a series of economic projects meant to be executed through the means of local resources;
- analysing economic contexts and opportunities in a given community, not only in terms of problems but also in terms of needs, resources and chances;
- engaging local media in creating a positive atmosphere in the community, favouring an active struggle against unemployment and economic recovery;
- **for the economic environment:**
 - the opportunity to promote companies, products, innovations and applied technologies;
 - the opportunity to present their own problems and needs to a wider public;
 - becoming familiarised with citizens' (prospective clients) needs;
 - building a wider trade network;
 - discovering new receiving markets;
 - identifying economic niche areas (the opportunity to explore them);
 - facilitating the activities of local companies thanks to creating a positive economic environment, through setting up business-related organisations, a change in the attitude of local authorities, adjusting bank offers to the needs of local entrepreneurs, etc;
 - forming partner relationships among businesses, local governments and various institutions (Social Insurance Institution, tax authorities, employment services) and also the citizens;
- **for local government:**
 - the opportunity to change the image and the way the authorities and officials are perceived by the citizens;
 - contact with different environments (prospective voters);
 - identifying problems and real needs of citizens (from different points of view) and the opportunity to solve them;
 - opportunity to promote the authorities and the people;
 - strengthening the economic environment;
 - direct openness to citizens;
 - acquiring specific economic projects supported by local community and ready to be executed;

- creating jobs for citizens based on local resources and companies [12, pp. 64-65].

It needs to be remembered that perhaps human resources are the most important indicator of the efficiency of the actions undertaken in a partnership. The final results of the whole undertaking depend first and foremost on human creativity, innovation and a charismatic leader. Charisma, however, does not mean the leader unconditionally imposing his/her vision and his/her authoritarian leadership [15, p. 88]. The practice of public management shows that under today's conditions a leader-coordinator is required, who will be able to skilfully tap into individual potentials and the strong points of others, rather than forcing his/her own will [15, p. 88].

The assessment of the functioning of existing partnerships is rather ambiguous. Most of them are created based on projects largely financed from EU aid funds. Once the subsidies end, some of them never resume their activities and dissolve. In Poland, nevertheless, there are positive examples, where a partnership formed in order to carry out a project has stood the test of time and effectively continues its activity. There is no doubt that the new challenges that local government units in Poland are faced with could be effectively and efficiently met through wide social compromise within established local partnerships whose purpose is to boost economic development in a given area. The success of this type of initiative depends largely on people, who will not only devote their time but who will also be able to reach a compromise, bringing together often conflicting interests of given groups within a common undertaking. One should hope that local partnerships will broaden their scope of activity, at the same time engaging members of local communities in participation.

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Резюме

Цель статьи – характеристика и оценка локальных партнерств, создаваемых главным образом для поддержания экономического развития данного региона.

Тезисы текста: системная трансформация в Польше способствовала возвращению развития самоуправления; структуры территориального самоуправления в Польше с формально-правовой стороны следует признать слишком когерентными; однако после более двух десятилетий функционирования территориального самоуправления возникли различные вопросы, касающиеся будущего; оказывается, следует более интенсивно, чем до сих пор, включать в структуры управления внешние субъекты, главным образом для того, чтобы улучшить и рационализировать процесс принятия совместных решений.

Ключевые слова: *местное самоуправление, местное партнерство, экономическое развитие, локальное развитие*