

The role of local authorities in local development in Europe

Streszczenie: Współcześnie rozwój społeczno-gospodarczy jest postrzegany lokalnie na całym świecie i trudno sobie wyobrazić wyodrębnione jednostki przestrzenne bez zaangażowania władz samorządowych. Władze lokalne odgrywają istotną rolę w rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczym. Dużą uwagę przypisuje się roli władz lokalnych, ze względu na możliwość bezpośrednich kontaktów z podmiotami gospodarczymi, przez co możliwość dostrzegania i identyfikacji powstających problemów i możliwości wskazania rozwiązania lub też zainspirowania do działań w kierunku ich rozwiązania. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie znaczenia władz lokalnych w rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczym.

1. Introduction. One of the activities undertaken currently by the European Union is an aspiration for widely understood development achieved by a decrease in world's poverty and reaching of Millennium Development Goals. The goals specified within the United Nations Millennium Project include development and strengthening of worldwide partnership in the range of development. The social-economic development is currently perceived locally all over the world, and it is difficult to imagine separated spatial units without an engagement of self-governance authorities. Development and strengthening of the worldwide partnership is to be achieved by support of an activity of local authorities, non-governmental institutions and local communities, and by the propagation of cooperation idea. For this purpose, the European Commission has undertaken a range of projects aimed at strengthening of self-governance authorities and other local entities contribution in particular countries development, including the most poorly developed ones. Also the literature presents the discussion concerning the role of the government in social-economic development and local economic development which is mainly focused on specification of suitable self-governance authorities, range, time and ways of its engagement [Luger, 2007].

An example of the activities undertaken by the European Commission may be establishing of the new Directorate General of Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid¹ (formed of two functioning separately so far: Directorate General of Development and EuropeAid Cooperation Office), which task is to facilitate the communication concerning the development. Various cooperation levels are emphasized: on global, regional, national and local level, pointing that “just

¹ EuropeAid is responsible for formation of the Union development policy and supporting the needed by programs and project all over the world.

local activity is essential in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals.” [*Changing the world...*, 2008]. Having above in mind, the aim of this article is determination of the role of self-governance authorities in local development. In order to realize the aim, the qualitative methods were used in the article which allowed to widen the state of knowledge concerning the examined phenomenon, the literature study of available elaborations, reports in the range of systematization of the knowledge and definitions related to local development.

2. Significance of local authorities for local development in an international scope.

The key EU documents concerning the issues of the role of local authorities in social-economic development include the communication of the European Commission *Local authorities: actors for development* [*Local authorities...*, 2008], in which the significance of local authorities in cooperation and policy of development is recognized, and it is accepted to establish strategic and common frameworks for experiences turnover and an increase in their contribution in development projects [*Changing the world...*, 2008, p. 1]. According to the document, the local authorities provide the unique add value to development process. Except definite activities of local authorities in developed countries, they go beyond the boundaries of their locality and play the key role in mobilization of various interested entities to cooperation. This way they contribute to creation of the spirit of cooperation in reaching of the common development goals. The local authorities are strongly engaged in development process by increasing of public awareness and support for this process due to their vicinity, experience and knowledge of specificity of local communities needs, and with a cooperation and support of suitable organizations they may perfectly support given territory development [*Local authorities...* 2008, p. 4]. The radical change in circumstances and mechanisms of spatial units development occurred as a result of the changes observed. In market economy conditions and in a view of an existence of democratic social structures, including territorial self-government, any top-down managing of social-economic development of territorial unit cannot be considered [Parysek, 2001, p. 52]. Having above in mind, the realization of development process in a bottom-up manner creates the necessity of undertaking of the activities on local level, which would concurrently take into account the specificity of a given self-governance unit.

In Poland, the need of local authorities engagement has been also pointing for the last 20 years, especially in the context that the development is currently a significant issue for each unit of the territorial self-government. The local authorities may undertake the activities in each issue with reservation, that they are not within the scope of higher level self-governance authorities competencies, that these activities are directed towards fulfillment of local interests, are legal [*Local authorities – competences...*2007]. For an accuracy of the decisions undertaken which determine the directions of local development, the self-governance authorities: community, district or

voivodeship self-government, were appointed to self-dependent performance of public tasks. The realization of the tasks assumed on the one hand aims at fulfillment of local communities needs, while on the other hand contributes to the development on local or regional level. It should be emphasized that just local authorities create local social-economic reality, are the best oriented to the needs of a given local community, on the possibilities of reasonable utilization of this area resources, on the level infrastructure, education etc. This results from the fact that they have a direct contact with the citizen, and on the other hand these are the representatives of the local society with respect to national authorities and international institutions. "The local self-government is responsible for the whole of the issues related to current and future needs of the local community, inter alia for forecasting of development directions, tendencies and development barriers, prevention of barriers formation and creation of cooperation system." [Kozuch 2011, p. 16]

The acceptance of the Act of territorial self-government of 8 March 1990 is considered as the first step of the self-government reform in Poland, and establishing of the level of the community is the beginning of self-government reconstruction in Poland [see more: Regulski 1999]. Despite that numerous researchers dealing with these issues claim that "the revolution is not finished – the activities which were aimed at real country decentralization were discarded", the self-government reform is considered as the most successful among the Polish reforms after 1989. Also the shortages in a complete implementation of the reform concerning self-governmental activity financing may be pointed: lack of the means for some of the tasks passed in a legal way or lack of transfer of the means for new tasks realization together with their implementation [Krasnowolsk 2007, p. 3]. However, the continuity of the changes introduction and amendments in legislative documentation which are aimed as the response on the problems occurring in the legislation, should be emphasized.

Not only Poland is aware of the benefits resulting from public authorities decentralization, and the example may be the countries which nearly in the same period like Poland passed the way of authority system decentralization, e.g. Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia or Czech, and also still amend and facilitate local self-government functioning [see more: Horváth 2000]. However in some countries, the self-governments reached assumed goal related to central authority decentralization in development policy, the engagement of others still exhibits a character of supplementary activities with respect to the central government.

Beginning of the reform and its continuation educated and demonstrated the significance of local authorities engagement being in a direct relation with the entities functioning within its boundaries in a development of given territorial unit. In turn, an engagement of local entities constitutes a guarantee of the rightness of activities being a subject of implementation, when possible taking into account the needs of local entities. The cooperation of local entities or

initiatives in the range of partnership means the activities which would multiply the efforts for development on local, regional or national level.

Interesting conclusions were presented by M. Luger, who tried to determine the role of self-governance authorities in current economic development on the example of the activities of local authorities in North Carolina. The results of this study allowed to formulate the general conclusions, aimed at a wider audience than only local self-governments of the United States: economic development is perceived as government activity to such degree that there is no need of the debate concerning this phenomenon; all levels of the public authority are engaged in economic development, only the responsibilities allocation and manners of their impact are subject to changes; in the time of knowledge-based economy, the traditional ways of influence (supply of water, ways, fiscal encouragements) may appear to be insufficient to reach the competitiveness by more poorly developed regions, therefore the self-governance authorities should focus their attention on a development of knowledge infrastructure (research institutes, universities etc.), which would allow the regions to attract the financial means in research-development sectors and make that they become more innovative [Luger 2007, p. 15].

The development of a given local community is affected by territorial self-government, private entrepreneurship, while central authorities and public economic sector constitute the neutral factors, or even ones acting in a negative manner [Gorzalak 2008, p. 12]. In some cases however, the country intervention in a form of impulses for increase or sustaining of bottom-up dynamics of development is necessary. The country is moreover obliged for correction in the whole country scale of drastic development differences in a situation of an increasing competitiveness between the local and regional communities [Korenik 2007, p. 37].

3. Conclusion. The above considerations confirm that the local authorities play a significant role in local development. Special attention is contributed to the role of local authorities due to the possibility of direct contacts with economic entities, and thus the possibility of perceiving and identification of occurring problems and possibility of pointing the solution or inspiration for the activities aimed at their solving. Unfortunately, except these positive examples of the activities for local development, the economic reality brings also ones which should be changed – terms in office, party system, personal animosity, mentality of local communities conditioned by tradition and history – often contribute to the slowdown of the activities for cooperation and local development. «The newest approaches point the co-governance and responsibility of administration for the needs fulfillment, not only direct performance of the tasks which may be entrusted to the economic units or social partners.» [Herbst 2006, 15]

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