

Remarks on factors of making municipalities strong socio-economic agents. Case of Poland

Piotr Żuber

**Warsaw University, Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies,
Principal Advisor, Ministry of EU Funds and Regional Development**

**U-LEAD with Europe International Expert Exchange 2021,
*“Partnership for Development”, 7-8 of December, 2021***

The role of self- governments in Poland

Expectations after 1989.

Decentralisation and self-governments would bring:

- improvement of efficiency of the state - better delivery of public services and goods;
- spreading and rooting democracy;
- preparing for EU membership;
- decreasing the level of corruption and misconduct.

The role of self-governments in Poland

Now (2021) self-governments seen as:

- stable element of democracy
 - Competitors of the central government - increase of big cities and regional authorities political significance;
- very efficient agents of planning and implementation projects which are close to people's needs;
- important players in promoting investment (technical and social) and growth opportunities (developing human resources, innovation, promotion of business);
- however - the situation of individual self-governments vary – smaller and poorer need not only equalisation mechanisms but also good support institutions.

**Self-
governments
were not
prepared to
play their roles**

.....

Barriers (municipalities from 1989, counties and regions from 1999 onwards):

- Limited administrative capacity to deal with investment projects and delivery of public (communal) services;
- Non-existing capacity to deal with more broader socio-economic challenges: development of human resources and promoting economic growth;
- Limited capacity to cooperate with external partners (government, NGOs sector, academia, private companies);
- Lack of sufficient financial resources;
- Lack of support institutions (at the beginning).

.....but everybody
wanted to change
the situation.
What factors
have helped?

Early decision on decentralisation - territorial reform seen as a way of modernisation of the country in political (democracy) and socio-economic terms (more agents- institutions dealing and feeling responsible for development and future of citizens);

Legal independence of the self-government (legal person) as a basis for building accountability and possibility to interact efficiently with public and private sector (banks, firms);

Establishing system of support institutions at local, regional and national level which gradually helped to build capacity of self-government to grow;

Europeanisation of practices coming in various forms – early pre-accession aid, procedures to follow, money to support preparation of projects, TA, after EU accession – EU programmes, etc.

How projects are being programmed and implemented at municipal level?

- **Bigger municipalities and regions have enough administrative capacity to develop and implement their projects however:**
 - Cooperation with banks and IFs to implement bigger and more infrastructural projects
 - Cooperation with academic and research sector to implement innovative and requiring know-how projects (Technological and Industrial Parks, Innovation Centres)
 - Important role of EU funds (money, principles, procedures, TA – in the form of Jaspers, Jessica)
 - multilevel governance system cooperation with the government, NGO's, Academia and private sector to realise complex integrated projects like e.g. revitalisation (urban regeneration) plans.
 - agencies and business support institutions used for special purpose projects (revitalisation,

How projects are being programmed and implemented today at municipal level?

- **Smaller municipalities require still support in project's design and implementation:**
 - Big role of the market (thanks to own financial resources);
 - The role of local, regional and national agencies and other support institutions;
 - Special budgetary or financed by EU financial vehicles for smaller municipalities and SMEs;
 - Support programmes enhancing cooperation among partners - run by regions and/or by the Government (Integrated Territorial Investments, Advisory Center for Municipalities, best practices to revitalisation, etc.)

Current challenges for Self-Governments In Poland

Vanishing money of self-governments

Centralization attempts (also within European policies)

Limited administrative capacity of poorest gminas

Too many financial instruments – what to choose?

Summary: key points of successful projects preparation and implementation at municipal level:

Strong legal basis of self-government = responsibility and accountability of municipalities;

Financial sources – fiscal decentralisation plus other money;

Institutional support system for developing administrative capacity (projects, TA, support institutions);

Trust between partners – multilevel system of governance (national, regional, local authorities, NGOs., private sector).