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

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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?

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<th>Event</th>
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<td><strong>Early decision on decentralisation</strong></td>
<td>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);</td>
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<td><strong>Legal independence of the self-government</strong></td>
<td>Legal person as a basis for building accountability and possibility to interact efficiently with public and private sector (banks, firms);</td>
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<td><strong>Establishing system of support institutions</strong></td>
<td>At local, regional and national level which gradually helped to build capacity of self-government to grow;</td>
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<td><strong>Europeanisation of practices coming in various forms</strong></td>
<td>Early pre-accession aid, procedures to follow, money to support preparation of projects, TA, after EU accession – EU programmes, etc.</td>
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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 municipaliteis;
- **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).