

### SUMMARY FOR GENERAL PUBLIC

Inter-Municipal Cooperation (IMC) becomes a more and more common method of public service delivery and searching the way to increase local competitiveness as well as influencing local economic development. It has been seen especially desired in countries where local governments are very small; it is sometimes seen as an alternative towards territorial amalgamation reforms. Appreciating advantages of voluntary intermunicipal cooperation, several international organizations such as Council of Europe and UNDP, support this way or organization as it helps to overcome problems related to territorial fragmentation and to services exceeding local boundaries.

And yet, we have a surprising deficit of empirical studies concerning every-day functioning of IMC institutions. The team of our Department is about to complete the implementation of the project "Inter Municipal Cooperation in Poland: Economic and Political Dimension" (NCN grant No. 221504), in the framework of which a quantitative analysis of various forms of IMC in Poland as well as an in-depth study of several inter-municipal associations (pol. *związki międzygminne*) had been conducted. In the course of the project the team has realized that inter-municipal cooperation in the form of private-law companies is a much underestimated topic in empirical studies. Therefore our proposal aims at filling in this gap by thorough analysis of intermunicipal cooperation realised within these institutions. We also aim at comparing functioning of intermunicipal companies and associations. In the framework of the research, we plan to answer question concerning, i.a.: most frequent fields of intermunicipal cooperation, its dynamics, its financial dimension, motives of formal cooperation establishment, actors involved in the cooperation, mechanism and problems of the multilateral decision-making process, and – last but not least – the relative importance of IMC in municipal policy-making.

Such a complex set of data on highly formalized cooperation institutions in Poland (taking into account both associations, and companies) provide a good basis for international comparisons. Thanks to the cooperation, which we launched in the framework of COST Action LocRef scientific network, we are able to compare our results with similar studies conducted simultaneously in seven other European countries. European international comparative researches on those issues have been rare so far, and those existing are based on relatively old data and cover neither Eastern part of the continent nor smaller European countries. The proposed study tries to fill those gaps in our knowledge, by covering Finland, Germany, Iceland, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. Thus, we take into account both "old" and "new" Member States located in different parts of the continent. The impact of the global economic crisis on IMC would be also an important element of international comparisons. The use of a uniform survey questionnaire will allow for comparative national and international analyzes including such issues as:

- motives beyond IMC establishment,
- main actors involved in the cooperation (local politicians – mayor or councilors, local government bureaucrats or technocrats such as managers of public utility companies),
- perception of IMC day-to-day performance,
- mutual relationships among member municipalities and between members and IMC institutions (company authorities, IMC office).

Moreover, the project will allow to verify the influence of various legal and institutional arrangements on the commonness of establishment and functioning of the inter-municipal cooperation. Here we take into consideration factors like: organizational culture, leadership, territorial fragmentation, and financial autonomy.

There is an intention to publish the results of our project both in the edited volume issued by one of European academic publishers and in the international peer-reviewed academic journal. The publications will include both comparisons among countries and in-depth analysis of inter-municipal cooperation in all involved countries. We also aim at publishing a few articles for general public (in *Wspólnota* or *Forum Samorządowe*) which would present in details comparison of Polish intermunicipal associations and companies. Such a complex comparative study can be a valuable source of information for both academics and practitioners.