

Description for the general public: Regional multiculturalism and its impact on civil society and quality of governance. A diagnosis of the Opole Voivodship

The main research question to be addressed is whether multiculturalism is conducive to emergence of civil society and stronger quality of governance or rather is it a factor impeding the development of the two mentioned dimensions of public sphere? We suppose that in the communes of the Opole Voivodeship characterized by national and ethnic diversity the civil society and quality of governance are stronger, comparing to the communes with a culturally homogenous population. This hypothesis, based on a commonly held beliefs concerning differences between the western and eastern parts of the Opole Voivodeship, is largely contrary to the dominant theories in the field. The theories, putting it simply, point to the negative impact of ethnic diversity on social capital and quality of government.

The Opole Voivodeship is a peculiar region characterized by tradition of multiculturalism, with the phenomenon being still present and experienced. Primarily it is a borderland region, constituting a border area with the Czech, German and Silesian cultures. It must be stressed that this multiculturalism is mostly experienced in the eastern part of the voivodeship, these being mostly populated by the minorities (German and Silesian). This pattern of cultural setting gives natural opportunity to investigate relations between cultural diversity and the degree of both the civil society and the quality of governance at the local level. In this context it must be noted that the chosen research problem is significant not only as a source of interesting knowledge about the Opole Voivodeship, but also as a contribution to the discussion over relations between multiculturalism, civic engagement and good governance. In the planned research we would like to provide knowledge that is important for understanding dynamics of the region and at the same time propose our own empirical and theoretical contribution to development of the social science. We assume that the multiculturalism of the Opole Voivodeship can be seen as a type of laboratory which opens an opportunity to test the hypothesis concerning impact of ethnic diversity on civic life and institutional performance. Equally, this research potential has not been adequately employed, as hitherto there had not been any research in this region which would approach the proposed topic in multidimensional and systematic manner. Another reason to focus on this research topic is a magnitude of raised issues from the point of view of a contemporary civilizational changes. The issue of multiculturalism has gained importance in the light of globalization and international migration, which seriously affect ethnic structure of the contemporary societies. The civil society development is considered as an important condition for consolidation of democratic systems. Whereas, the quality of governance has become not only a moral demand, but also an important dimension of social and economic policy. It means that research which investigates these issues separately, should rather be replaced by tracing the causal relationships between them. Such perspective seems to be an important condition if we would like to accurate insight into complex civilizational changes faced by contemporary states.