

The research problem of the project are the social and political consequences of the rationalization of the network of primary schools in rural and urban-rural municipalities by local authorities (mainly the executive body - mayor) and how to counteract the negative effects of decisions taken by the authorities. The main aim of the project is to identify the possibilities used by local authorities in the situation when the local school network needs to be rationalized (taking one of the following forms: school closing, joining schools in teams, lowering the degree of school organization and school takeover (and manage) by other entity eg. association), and to examine how this decision influences the public support and future political career of local authorities. The decision on the local school network rationalization mainly affects the executive body of the municipality (mayor), therefore, the subject of the studies undertaken within this project will be primarily focused on social and political consequences concerning the municipal mayor.

The indicated research problem will be considered in three dimensions:

- a) the political cost incurred by the executive body (mayors), including the loss of its previous position (the mayor's appeal) as a consequence of the unpopular/socially not acceptable decision;
- b) effectiveness of educational policy with regard to the effectiveness of other public policies, especially in terms of financial and organizational efficiency;
- c) social impact of political decisions and relationships between local communities (particular social groups) and local authorities.

The main hypothesis of the research was formulated as follows: the decision to limit local school network affects the attitude of the local community to the mayor and reduces the support in the next election. Mayors are aware of social and political consequences of education policy, therefore, seek for (other than liquidation) ways of local school network rationalization.

The problem of local school network rationalization is currently of interest not only in Poland, but also in other European countries as well as other countries including the United States and Canada. The studies that have been conducted so far in relations to the issue of school network rationalization in majority focused on demographic tendencies and influences of schools network changes on the quality of education and economic efficiency of the public sector (municipalities). The research focused on political and social costs of such decisions have not been already undertaken. However, this problem was spotted by the media (especially local), but not supported by research results.

The research team plan to conduct in-depth interviews in the rural and urban-rural municipalities located in 3 selected regions. The research team based on preliminary research has selected 3 Polish regions (purposeful selection): świętokrzyskie, pomorskie, mazowieckie, where during 2006-2014, the schools' networks have been rationalized. The mentioned period covers two full terms of self-government. It was significant to observe the research problem over two terms to analyze the political and social consequences borne by local authorities. The selection of three regions was based on the analysis of data provided by the Department of Analyses and Forecasts Ministry of Education. Selection of particular municipalities for testing is twofold. In the first stage, the research team decided to select regions. In the stage, the particular municipalities will be chosen.

The theoretical framework of the planned research project consists of the following approaches: rational choice theory, theories of conflict and elements of the decision-making theory. The research will be carried out using methods such as the institutional and legal analysis, the analysis of scientific discourse and data (including legislative acts, documents, existing data, literature and media discourse), case studies and comparative method.