

## **Leadership in Cities Affected by Defunctionalisation**

The quality of life is to a large extent determined by the closest environment associated with one's place of residence. In this respect, the key role in ensuring appropriate conditions and also in improving the quality of life is played by local governments (including the urban ones). The possibilities and scope of activity of local government authorities depends on a number of factors, among which a significant part is played by the financial resources, thanks to which it is possible not only to maintain, but also to develop the infrastructure or expand the range and quality of public services provided. An increasingly prominent phenomenon (not only in Poland) is the population decline, the reasons for which should be sought, among others, in unfavourable demographic trends, economic emigration or internal migrations. This results in a significant decrease in the so-called tax base, and leads to a decrease in local government revenues. This, in turn, not only reduces the development opportunities, but also contributes to a significant increase in the per capita costs of infrastructure maintenance or service provision. In Poland, this phenomenon is particularly evident in the case of medium-sized cities, which are affected by the so-called negative defunctionalisation, i.e. a permanent loss of their capacity to perform their functions and a deteriorating socio-economic situation. In a report commissioned by the S. Leszczyński Institute of Geography and Spatial Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a group of 64 such cities (out of 255 so-called medium-sized cities) was identified. Nevertheless, the group comprises cities that significantly differ both in terms of population (from 15,000 to over 200,000) and the range of measures taken to combat the effects of population loss and, what is particularly important, their outcomes.

The main objective of the study is to develop a model aimed at explaining the interdependence between the type of urban leadership and strategies of matching (evolution) of the role, function and scope of action taken by the depopulating cities using the Actor in action theory. The research problem underlying the project is a search for relationships between the types of urban leadership and adaptation strategies adopted by medium-sized cities in the face of their negative defunctionalisation. The theoretical model developed on such a basis will inform further theoretical and empirical work on the analysis and design of public policies at the local government level, including the role of local actors in these activities.

In order to achieve the objective of the project, quantitative and qualitative research will be carried out in 20 cities threatened with permanent loss of their municipal functions. As part of qualitative research, it is planned to conduct about 100 interviews with the key actors of local political, social and economic life. Quantitative research will make it possible to identify the extent to which the cities affected by this phenomenon differ from one another, to assess the outcomes of action strategies taken and to test the theoretical model.

The problems of cities which have lost their functions and are experiencing a socio-economic decline have yet to be addressed by Polish researchers from the institutional perspective. The search for a model associating the type of urban leadership and action strategies of leaders in relation to the problems faced by the above mentioned cities contributes to the originality and innovativeness of the approach.