

Community power structures and styles of political leadership in Polish local governments

Who really governs the municipality? Who has influence on decisions concerning urban development? Looking only from the point of view of legal regulations and formal authority structures does not tell us everything. Effective management of a modern city requires the ability of local authorities to cooperate with other people and institutions. Consequently, some decisions are also influenced by people and organisations who are not part of the formal structures of local government - e.g. influential businessmen, social organisations, local community activists. The aim of the project is to better understand contemporary power structures in Polish municipalities, beyond the formal local political scene.

A second objective is to look at the styles of leadership of Polish mayors. What styles of leadership is expected by citizens and how do they perceive the actual behaviour of municipal political leaders? In characterising leadership styles, we will consider to what extent municipal leaders are guided by their own development vision and to what extent they rely on consultations with other actors. The second dimension differentiating leadership styles is whether the implementation of policies is based exclusively on the resources of the authorities and local administration or whether attempts are made to mobilise resources that are at the disposal of other actors, such as entrepreneurs or social organisations. We are also interested in the relationship between leadership styles and the community power structure in the municipality, and in understanding the relationship between the composition of local power coalitions and the leadership styles of Polish mayors.

The subject of the study will therefore be not only local authorities, but also informal coalitions which members share a common goal they want to achieve and which have adequate resources to achieve this goal. An example of such a power structure in the Polish context may be a coalition of local government politicians with a local (or external) developer company interested in housing or tourist investments in the city. Both entities must cooperate with each other, work out mechanisms of cooperation that will ensure that both parties benefit from the achieving of the common goal. In this project we are interested in the composition of such coalitions, what are their motives and goals, what resources they use to achieve their goals, and what are relationships among their members. In particular, we will try to answer the following questions:

1. what factors may lead changes in local governance coalitions (apart from personal changes in the position of mayor)?
2. what is the influence of the size of the municipality on the shape and composition of governing coalitions and styles of political leadership?
3. which leadership styles coexist with which types and compositions of governing coalitions?

We assume that both the characteristics of municipalities, in particular the size of local government units, and the leadership style of the mayor influence the community power structures. In the project we will verify these assumptions.

Empirical research will concern situation in Poland. In the framework of the project we intend to conduct a nationwide survey of the residents, which will allow to find out what are the preferences and perceptions of the residents of the actual leadership styles of Polish mayors and the perceptions of the local power coalitions. The results of the survey will form the background for the main part of the empirical study, which will be carried out in three selected municipalities (cities) differing in size (a large city of at least 100,000 inhabitants, a typical county capital town and a smaller city or the mixed urban-rural municipality). This part of the research will be based on the analysis of the content of official documents and articles in the local press (including internet portals), in-depth interviews with members of local elites and questionnaires with citizens of selected towns. The research will refer to the implementation of selected projects or programmes, such as, for example, urban regeneration programmes for selected city neighbourhoods.

The results of the research will be published in Polish and international academic journals and also presented during scientific conferences.