

Ievgeniia Golysheva (ORCID: 0000-0001-7788-9897)

Faculty of Management, Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Wrocław, Poland, e-mail: ievgeniia.golysheva@pwr.edu.pl

Jerzy Tutaj (ORCID: 0000-0002-1764-5011)

Faculty of Management, Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Wrocław, Poland, e-mail: jerzy.tutaj@pwr.edu.pl

Local government management: Polish and Ukrainian experiences

Zarządzanie samorządem: polskie i ukraińskie doświadczenia

ABSTRACT

The paper outlines the main aspects of local self-governments in Ukraine and Poland. The presented results will form the basis of further research into the areas of cooperation between Ukrainian and Polish local communities. These issues will be especially relevant during the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine.

Keywords: local community, self-government, cooperation.

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule przedstawiono główne aspekty działalności samorządów lokalnych w Ukrainie i Polsce. Zaprezentowane wyniki będą podstawą do dalszych badań nad obszarami współpracy ukraińskich i polskich społeczności lokalnych. Zagadnienia te będą szczególnie istotne podczas powojennej odbudowy Ukrainy.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczność lokalna, samorząd, współpraca.

INTRODUCTION

Most European countries organize the local management of their territories in the direction of decentralization and granting the principles of autonomy to the decision-making process at the level of local communities. It requires the active involvement of local government officials and representatives of local businesses and residents in the planning and management of territories. According to The European Charter of Local Self-Government (Council of Europe, 1985), local authorities, acting within the limits of the law, should be able to regulate and manage a significant part of public activity under their responsibility in the interests of the local population. Given the effectiveness of management, state duties should mainly be carried out by authorities closest to citizens. Higher-level management can be involved only in the case of general coordination or when the performance of duties by local self-government is impossible or less effective.

Local government is the oldest structure of power and management in society. However, its renaissance is observed in countries where the central authority has dominated for the last decades. The ability to manage one's community, which is, on the one hand, the result of the maturity of the state au-

thorities, which can give space and autonomy, and, on the other hand, a strong civil society, which makes rational personnel choices and can maintain the appropriate tension between the citizen and the authorities at the local level – is a condition for harmonious development not only of local communities but also of the entire country. The event that significantly impacted the emergence of social self-government was the collapse of the feudal state and the abolition of the state society. This was the beginning of civil democracy, in which all people were to be free and equal before the law. “The 19th century brought irreversible political transformations, which resulted in the establishment of new electoral rights, equal rights, and the formation of political parties”. Both the French Revolution of 1789, promoting the slogan: “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” and the earlier one for the independence of the United States, had an undeniable impact on the fate of the world at that time. The words of Thomas Jefferson, the author of the “Declaration of Independence” of 1776: “All men are created equal and endowed by the Creator with natural, inalienable rights, including the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” resonated widely not only among American citizens.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Until 2014, the works of scientists who researched the problems and principles of reforming local self-government in Ukraine were mainly focused on finding ways to reform the Ukrainian system based on the study of the European experience (Kopyl, 2011; Boryslavska et al., 2012; etc.).

In 2014, the Concept of Reform of Local Self-Government and Territorial Organization of Power in Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy, 2014) was adopted, and decentralization was chosen as the only direction of reform. In the same year, the leading state information portal on the reform of local government and territorial organization of power (decentralization) <https://decentralization.gov.ua/> was created. Since then, scientists have focused on studying the process of reforming local self-government and developing recommendations for adapting the European experience to Ukrainian realities (Zaslavska & Ogorodnyk, 2017; Deitch, 2020; Romanova & Umland, 2021).

With the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russia on the territory of Ukraine, the issue of continuing the reform of local government took a back seat. Nevertheless, more and more research is focused on the problems and directions of the post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian territories, as well as the role of local authorities in this activity (Hohol & Tsybulska, 2022).

In 1990, together with the local government reform, Poland entered the path of decentralizing state power and allowed thousands of farmers to appear on its territories. As a result, substantial social energy was released. However, enthusiasm and superficially acquired knowledge often had to compensate for the lack of competence in the field of management and exercising power in the field. That is why it is so important, from the point of view of social interest, to gather experience and to transfer practical skills in the field of management science, not only in order to improve skills but, above all, to increase the level of awareness along mentality change – after so many years of socialism – both for local government practitioners and stakeholders of their services: residents, entrepreneurs or investors. Local government in 1990 and 1998 awakened local and regional social forces and local identity.

The reforms restored legal personality, property, and local government finances. The last thirty years have proven that local government reforms are Poland's greatest success. Due to them, the pillars of democracy and free market economy have been strengthened. Administration units have become providers of various public services, from regulatory activities within their competence to administrative decision-making, to creating and implementing programs to meet public needs in their area and on their territory. The role of local governments is to perform public tasks to initiate activities for local development based on their statutory competencies and human and material resources under their control.

2. MANAGEMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN PRACTICE

2.1. Experience in Ukraine

Since introducing the reform in 2014, two stages have officially occurred in Ukraine, and the third should continue now. The first stage took place during 2014–2019. The main results of this stage are the implementation of administrative and financial decentralization at the legislative level (Romanova & Umland, 2021; Detsentralizatsiia, 2022).

In 2020–2021, the reform moved to the 2nd stage, the main task of which was to complete the change of the administrative-territorial system at the primary level. If, at the previous stage, territorial units could unite voluntarily, at this stage, state authorities decided to form territorial communities from the remaining settlements. In further implementing this stage, Ukraine had to move from a three-level system of territorial administration (communities, districts, regions) to two levels with elimination districts. However, such changes require changes to the Constitution of Ukraine, which has always been a long-term and controversial process.

Therefore, the third stage of the reform is expected to complete the changes that have begun in Ukraine's administrative and territorial system. As well as to include the active involvement of the self-government of local communities in the post-war reconstruction of their territories. Expanding the powers of the local self-government institute is a new opportunity for war-affected communities. It is the improvement of the well-being of residents of villages and small towns thanks to the implementation of new educational, social, medical, cultural, and infrastructure projects.

2.2. Experience in Poland

The local government reform of 1990 (creation of communes) and 1998 (creation of counties (powiats) and voivodeships) influenced the decentralization of power. However, the importance and strength of local governments are still unsatisfactory (over the years, central authorities have delegated tasks to a lower level, mainly due to the lack of financial resources for local governments to deal with them). Since 1999, there have been three levels of self-government in Poland: voivodeship, powiat, and communes. There are 16 voivodeships in Poland, which are often referred to interchangeably as regions. It should be added, however, that the voivodeship has a local and state dimension. The representative of the central authority, the Prime Minister in the voivodeship, is the Voivode. Voivodeships – in terms of self-government – have systemic solutions that are well adapted to the current challenges resulting from Poland's participation in the European Union. Voivodeship boards allow for better consideration of economic diversity and conflicts in times of crisis. After Lipowicz (2019), it should be added that the Sejmiks turned out to be a competent representation of the region, and the presence of Poland in the Committee of the Regions, which is above standard, is highly appreciated.

3. DIMENSIONS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT BODIES AND SCIENCE IN POLAND AND UKRAINE

Polish experience in the strategic development of small homelands can be reduced to the following statements:

- Commune – ECONOMIC – enterprising, development only according to own priorities;
- Commune – USEFUL – internally and externally, good host and patron, reliable and loyal partner;
- Commune – STABLE – crisis survival capital and response measures;
- Municipality – READY FOR THE FUTURE – adaptive intelligence, the main asset in times of uncertainty;
- The commune – FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS – shapes successors;
- Commune – INVESTING IN THE FUTURE – not overeating current capital;
- Commune – INNOVATIVE – a position built on original and successful projects;
- Municipality – CITIZENSHIP – a real, diverse society;
- Commune – HOME – bonds of identity, positive emotions, reasons to be proud;
- Commune – SOLIDARITY AND HONEST – support in need – yes, free riding – no;
- Commune – SELF-GOVERNMENT – efficient administration motivated by the interests of residents.

Cooperation between the local self-government bodies of Ukraine and Poland can be very fruitful, aimed at the development of both countries and the reconstruction of Ukrainian territories after the war:

1. Exchange of experience in local area management: Local governments can share best practices in urban and rural management, including development planning, infrastructure, transport, ecology, and housing.

2. Joint infrastructure projects: Joint infrastructure development, such as roads, bridges, water supply, and sewage disposal, can improve the living conditions of citizens of both countries in border communities.

3. Development of intercultural exchange and tourism: Local self-government bodies can jointly promote the development of intercultural exchange by organizing cultural events, festivals, exhibitions, and other events. It can also support the development of tourism in Ukraine and attract the attention of foreign investors in the post-war period.

4. Cooperation in the field of education: Local self-government bodies can jointly support the exchange of administrative and teaching staff between educational institutions in

the local territories of both countries.

5. Joint development of environmental initiatives: Local governments can work together on environmental projects such as environmental protection, energy efficiency, renewable energy, and green building.

6. Entrepreneurship support and development of small and medium-sized enterprises: Local self-government bodies can jointly create favorable conditions for entrepreneurship development, support small and medium-sized enterprises, and jointly organize training and seminars for entrepreneurs.

7. Exchange of experience in the field of health care of residents: Local self-government bodies can work together on issues of preserving the health of the population of their territories, exchange experience in the organization of the medical system in local communities, and support joint projects in the field of health care.

These areas of cooperation can play an essential role in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine and contribute to the development of both countries through the exchange of experience, resources, and ideas.

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