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## **STRATEGIC AIMS OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN LOWER SILESIAN COMMUNES**

Підкреслена зростаюча роль місцевого самоврядування. Проаналізовані можливості, перспективи, загрози та проблеми цього процесу. В статті представлені результати дослідження щодо стратегічних цілей регіонального розвитку в Нижній Сілезії. Їх ідентифікація, опис та класифікація стали основою для обґрунтування доцільності функціонування регіональної стратегії розвитку.

Communal self-government has substantially increased its role since 1989. Although new chances and opportunities have been given, many new threats and problems had to be faced up. The article describes the results of the research concerning strategic aims of local development in Lower Silesian region. Their identification, as well as description and classification are the basis to draw conclusions considering the usefulness in implementation process of local development strategies

During the last twenty years of the economic transformation Poland has fundamentally changed its face. Democratic rules of the state's functioning and the market economy were introduced, the old fields of economy are being reorganized and the new modern ones are developing dynamically [3]. As a result of economic transformation the role of local governments in Poland has significantly grown. They are responsible particularly for supporting local development through financing projects aimed at improving quality of life in local environment. To reach this aim local governments formulate strategy, which defines goals and identifies areas recognized as the most important from the point of view achieving these aims, on which local government's activities will be concentrated.

The article presents some conclusions gathered during holistic empirical research of Lower Silesian communities. It describes the main directions of development resulting in strategic aims declared by communes in Lower – Silesian region. Their identification, as well as description and classification are the basis to draw conclusions considering the usefulness in implementation process of local development strategies.

Within the current territorial division commune (gmina) plays a very significant role. It is the lowest level of fundamental three-tier territorial division of the country (Local self government in Poland comprises: voivodships (the highest level of fundamental territorial division), poviats (middle level) and communes (currently,

there are 2478 units in Poland)). Commune is an administrative entity composed of a self-government community (*gmina* inhabitants) and the relevant territory. There are three types of communes:

- a) urban commune (*gmina miejska*) - consists of just one city or town,
- b) mixed (urban-rural) commune (*gmina miejsko-wiejska*) - consists of a town and its surrounding villages,
- c) rural commune (*gmina wiejska*) - consists only of villages.

Every commune has its own democratically elected leadership. A commune is typically governed by a mayor and a municipal council (city council). The municipal council is the legislative and controlling body of each commune. Executive power is held by the directly elected mayor, called *wójt* in rural communes, *burmistrz* in most urban and urban-rural communes, or *prezydent* in towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants and some others which traditionally use the title.

The most important aim of communal self-government is local development. To reach this aim communes are expected to solve problems of the local labour market, reduce areas of social exclusion advance the educational level and develop local infrastructure. Identification of main problems, regarding the process of local development that the local communities are dealing with, is only the starting point. Local authorities are expected not only to use its powers but to facilitate and inspire other local actors' actions as well. It raises the demands of more innovative ways of solving experienced problems. To be successful communes first of all need to introduce a strategic approach in management process.

The increasing role of a communal self-government triggers the need of new strategies enabling its proper functioning which can be achieved through a long-term analysis of the local social problems. This is reflected in a recently observed increased interest of communes in working out strategies for future development. In recent years local authorities try to go beyond one year budgeting and capital expenditure planning for a longer-term focus. These demands are met by strategic management, which can be defined as a process of specifying long-term objectives with the plan providing details how to achieve these objectives [2, 6]. First of all strategies should name the values that local authorities want to emphasize. These generate a vision bound by the time-frame adopted and the realistic appraisal of resources. As a result strategy is the principal document defining the goals and priorities of local development and the conditions that should ensure this development. It is the process of specifying the local development's objectives, developing policies and plans to achieve these objectives and allocating resources to implement those expectations.

Although not obliged by law, numerous units have undertaken actions to elaborate strategic planning in a form of documents with a long-term perspective. Local development strategy has numerous beneficial effects, such as [1, 4]:

- a) accumulation of limited funds and actions around the main expectations of local communities,
- b) Coordination of operations undertaken by local units to enable the planned development,
- c) Opening to new perspectives for financial support from the European Union Funds.

Strategy encompasses all development activities undertaken in order to improve the social and economic conditions. Its task is a courageous but at the same time realistic programming of development and modernization of the local territory, with special attention to the opportunities of using Poland's presence in the European Union and also all resources and advantages that communes in Lower Silesia possess, for the development and improvement of the level and quality of life. As a result strategy constitutes a foundation of an effective usage of the development funds for the achievement of the social and economic goals, and at the same time serves a basis for multiplying the volume of funds by a higher and more effective local economic growth.

It is only half of the success to develop a good strategy. Equally important is the implementation process, since it can "make or break" the best strategy. The key factor is a correlation of strategic planning with time perspective. Since the communal planning has its basis in a yearly prepared budget, all strategies have to be undertaken in correlation with this financial policy. The main question is how to transform long term objectives defined in a strategy into activities undertaken by local authorities in a yearly prepared budget. To find an answer the author of the article carried out the research in the Lower Silesian region. Research included:

- a) a questionnaire sent by email to all Lower Silesian communes,
- b) an analysis of the documents concerning local development strategies and budgets of the Lower Silesian communities,
- c) a local research including interviews with the representatives of local authorities,

The research showed that over 90% of the Lower Silesian communities have elaborated their development strategies. This has been done with the assistance of external experts as well as the representatives of local communities.

The creation of the local strategies has been preceded by a series of extensive consultations with experts who represented organizations and institutions that are most competent to express views on the issue of local development. Most frequently quoted strategic aims are presented in schedule 1.

As the schedule 1 presents the most frequently quoted strategic aim is supporting local economic growth. Local strategies assume a significant increase of competitiveness of both enterprises and communes, essential for reaching a high sustainable economic growth and an increase of employment and affluence of its citizens.

Strategic aims of local development in Lower Silesian communes

Strategic aim	In % of total
Supporting local economic growth	92,73%
Development of technical infrastructure	60,00%
Protection of the natural environment	52,73%
Raising the level and quality of life	52,73%
Development of tourism	40,00%
Restructuring of agricultural areas	32,73%
Housing infrastructure	18,18%
Social activation	16,36%
Development of education	14,55%
Investments in sport and cultural infrastructure	12,73%
Improving the efficiency of communal management	10,91%
Promote flexible and alternative forms of employment	10,91%
Promotion of the local territory	9,09%
Better access to medical services	9,09%

*Source: Study on basis of own research*

Conditions will be created for stimulating and using of internal sources of growth for the development of entrepreneurship and raising the technologic level of the economy.

In order to speed up the local economic growth communes strive to make efforts of building and modernizing infrastructure conditioning conducting a competitive activity by entrepreneurs and reaching by the citizens the European civilization level. Essential condition is availability of technical infrastructure, which requires at present modernization and expansion. The main aim of supporting investments in technical infrastructure is raising the quality of the transport system, as well as the development of the modern IT technologies broadly available for the public and business sector.

Another important strategic aim of Lower Silesian communes is protection of natural environment. In the scope of the environmental protection communes plan to undertake actions connected with purifying sewage, providing high-quality potable water, managing waste and reclamation of degraded lands. Therefore, construction of sewage treatment plans and sewerage will be supported to limit channeling of harmful substances to waters.

Raising the standard of living of the residents signifies, apart from investments in technical infrastructure, also the necessity to provide a sufficient access to education and medical, welfare and social services, as well as leisure infrastructure. Infrastructure of the social services is aimed at forming the level and the quality of life. It means an essential improvement of the feeling of safety among the citizens,

raising the qualifications of the citizens, participation in a democratic life, membership in integrated, helpful local community, enabling better harmonization of family and activity within civic society.

Among the others quoted strategic aims it is worth to pay close attention at development of tourism. In order to function and compete on the tourist market, Lower Silesian communes must have a rich range of services which require creation or extension of buildings of the following bases: accommodation, gastronomic, conference bases, recreation and entertainment infrastructure. Many Lower Silesian communes have at their disposal unique on the European scale natural endowment (habitats of birds, forests, lakes, mountains) that can form a basis for the development of specialized tourism as well as ordinary tourism. However, one of the basic factors behind the development of tourism is availability of the lands and buildings, but this depends first of all on condition of the transport infrastructure.

The analysis of the obtained data shows that local municipalities in predominant measure declare offensive aims, what on the one hand is desirable, but on the other raises question about reasons of such an approach and first of all about the chances of their implementation. These doubts are raised by financial difficulties observed in local municipalities of Lower-Silesian region.

The analysis of declared aims proved moreover, that the local governments only in exceptional cases take the risk of stressing its individuality based on local issues. Decisions made by local authorities extremely seldom run out apart from stereotypes, they also prove the lack of innovative character. The accumulation of faced problems, pressure of current needs and inert character of activities undertaken by local authorities result in schematic choice and do not favor reflection on new, more innovative ways of solving experienced problems.

To implement the local strategy, coordinated actions are required, as determined by documents prepared at local government level. The analysis of the obtained data showed that local strategies are not consequently realized. This is mainly due to the mistakes made at the strategy formulation process which renders its successful implementation difficult. A common fault is establishing too many targets which with limited financial capacity make their realization very unrealistic. And as a result local development strategies often remain to be the declarations on paper with a little possibility of implementation.

Further barrier concerns financial difficulties related to limited skills of communal staff to obtain external financial sources. Taking advantage of European Union funds is still rare in many communities. Besides, political matters can create serious problems in strategy implementation process. Changes in local government very often result in abandoning the policy initiated by the previous political option. In a long term it does not help in sustaining any continuity in operation or in consequent realization of the local development aims.

The analysis of the obtained data allows describing main factors which determine effective transformation of strategic intentions to the tasks realized in a current financial year. The most important suggestions for better functioning of the strategies as a realistic tool for shaping the changes in local territories comprises:

a) Establishing a form of cooperation between the local authorities and the private sector within the public-private partnership (PPP). The partnership should involve both: cooperation in implementation of particular elements of the strategy and harmonization of such undertakings in various spheres of the self-government's activity.

b) Raising the awareness and skills of the local authorities and staff to deal with local strategies. It would concern particularly the tools and planning techniques (such as multi-year financial prognoses) enhancing strategy implementation.

c) Introduction of necessary organizational changes in managing the communities in order to increase a motivation and involvement of the governing bodies and staff in the realm of strategy implementation.

Usage of these factors significantly affects implementation process of local development strategies. It is obvious that the presented suggestions illustrate a very general outlook on future actions. However they should be treated as preliminary conditions whose fulfilling increases the probability of strategic changes of the local territories.

Strategy can play a very significant role for local communities since it has a big impact on local development. However, results have often fallen short of what strategic management is supposed to achieve. Practical observations show that communities have many problems with consistent realization of strategic objectives. Successful realization of the goals of the local strategies will require overcoming a range of weaknesses connected with bad condition of infrastructure, difficult situation in the scope of social benefits, low innovation, excessive regional diversification or insufficiently effective functioning of the local administration.

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