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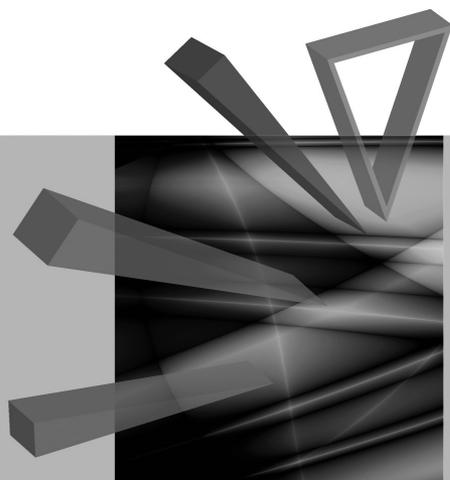
RESEARCH PAPERS

of Wrocław University of Economics

282

Local Economy in Theory and Practice

Planning and Evaluation Aspects



edited by

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Publishing House of Wrocław University of Economics
Wrocław 2013

Copy-editing: Elżbieta Macauley, Tim Macauley, Marcin Orszulak

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Proof-reading: Aleksandra Śliwka

Typesetting: Adam Dębski

Cover design: Beata Dębska

This publication is available at www.ibuk.pl, www.ebscohost.com, and in The Central and Eastern European Online Library www.ceeol.com as well as in the annotated bibliography of economic issues of BazEkon http://kangur.uek.krakow.pl/bazy_ae/bazekon/nowy/index.php

Information on submitting and reviewing papers is available on the Publishing House's website www.wydawnictwo.ue.wroc.pl

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Wrocław 2013

ISSN 1899-3192

ISBN 978-83-7695-329-8

The original version: printed

Printing: Printing House TOTEM

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Andrzej Sztando

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LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLANNING AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF COMMUNAL AUTHORITIES: THE POLISH EXPERIENCE

Summary: This article is devoted to the problems of Polish communal authorities' social responsibility in the process of local development planning. At the beginning of the article the author defines the concept of the social responsibility of these authorities. Next the category of local development and its management process are discussed, followed by presenting the relations between local development strategic planning problems and the idea of social responsibility. The empirical part of the article includes the author's research results in the form of examples illustrating incorrect activities undertaken by local authorities in the process of the preparation of development strategies, which may be considered as a failure of their social responsibility.

Keywords: Poland, social responsibility, local development, strategic management, planning, commune.

1. Introduction

The role of territorial self-government units in the social and economic development of the Polish national economy has been growing continuously since the time of their establishment, i.e. 1990. This has been confirmed by the increasing scope of tasks they keep implementing, by the volume of material and non-material means at their disposal, and also by the number of private and public entities which enter into interactions with them. The domains of knowledge responsible for describing, offering guidelines and improving activities which refer to territorial self-government units' management, keep developing concurrently and dynamically. This article reflects these problems and concentrates on two objectives. The first one is focused on indicating the relations between the management processes carried out at the lowest self-government level and the social responsibility problems. The second objective is to present the part of research results conducted by the author and referring to the absence of such responsibility in the Polish strategic planning of

local development¹. To be more specific, it deals with the identification of the most frequently observed manifestations confirming the lack of such responsibility. The above research was conducted by means of the application of the three following methods: direct interviews with about forty individuals who perform the functions of local authorities in different communes² in which such planning projects were carried out. The research also involved the analyses of documents in which the work focused on local development strategy construction was described, i.e. special reports, and also final, strategic documents including such information. They were collected from 25 communes. The final, third, method consisted in observations of behaviour characteristic for local authorities representatives, performed by the author in the process of his implementation of independent planning projects aimed at creating a communal development strategy, or while leading expert teams were performing such work. It was applied in the process of constructing 40 strategies for communal development. Overall data were collected in the period of 1994–2011 and refer to entities located in all regions of Poland.

2. Social responsibility of communal authorities

Problems of institutional social responsibility are discussed in professional literature, which is quite abundant. The majority concentrates on corporate social responsibility, defined e.g. as moral responsibility and an obligation to be accountable, within legal constraints and before society, for the performed activities [Zbiegień-Maciąg 1997], or as a certain sensitivity to external environment issues (social, ecological sensitivity), as well as the capacity of keeping a balance between the interests of clients, workers and shareholders, but also rendering certain services for the benefit of the local community [Żemigala 2008]. In a broader perspective, it is defined as the new, global direction of changes in an enterprise's strategic management, which exerts an obligation on companies to follow the principles of sustainable development and respect the rules of economics, ecology and ethics [Korpus 2006]. At this point it should be emphasized that, in spite of a long lasting scientific debate, this direction has not gained general acceptance and its opponents, who quote the statement by the Nobel Prize winner in economics – M. Friedman [Friedman 1970], according to whom “the business of business is business”, claim that enterprises should focus mainly on maximizing profits. Such an opinion is represented by the vast majority of business management practitioners. However, corporate social responsibility is a concept which also refers to public organizations. Having considered the standpoint

¹ The research is a part of a more extensive research programme carried out by the author and devoted to barriers in strategic management of local development, the results of which are included, among others, in [Sztando 2008; 2010].

² Whenever the discussion refers to communes they should be understood as rural, urban-rural and urban communes.

of those who are against considering CSR as one of the business activity indicators, it does refer to them to the same or even to a larger extent. The scope of the concept of public organizations' social responsibility, among many other components, also covers the responsibility for economic entities' performance, which are independent from them in relation to capital. One of the many traditional and unquestionable roles played by public organizations is their regulatory role focused on implementing such transformations in social, economic and environmental structures which could be defined as development. This is reflected and emphasized in many of its definitions which describe it e.g. as an organization functioning in a public sector, i.e. a public institution influencing the economy, both in the sphere of regulations and actual activities performed by economic entities [Kozuch 2002, p. 343].

Among numerous public organizations, characteristic for the majority of democratic societies following market economy rules, there are also local self-governments. In Poland they are represented by communal self-governments. Having assumed a certain simplification, the social responsibility of communal self-governments may be identified with the social responsibility of local authorities, i.e. the legislative (council) and executive bodies (village head, mayor, town president). While attempting to define this category, a statement may be put forward that the social responsibility of local authorities means responsibility before the local community, i.e. the population of a commune, for representing their interests understood in many aspects, in the long-term perspective, both as a group and individually. Owing to public authority decentralization, the local community plays the role of the communal self-government electorate and, as the result of public responsibility decentralization, also plays the role of a group reviewer monitoring how properly and correctly their interests are represented, with its culmination in election and referendum acts. The above mentioned interest may not be referred to as the simple sum of expectations and unsatisfied needs of all the communes' inhabitants, even supported by the legality, substantiality, efficiency and effectiveness of all the public means application. This must be understood much more extensively, since it also involves making forecasts and influencing these expectations and needs – sometimes even in directions quite opposite to those followed currently. Such activities seem indispensable e.g. for ensuring sustainable development, public safety and – at the given civilization development stage – the desired level of social solidarity. This also covers influencing the economic, social and environmental public and private structures. Establishing favourable conditions for the local system cooperation with its environment is also included in its structures. What is more, in all the above listed aspects, this interest refers not only to present, but also to future inhabitants of a commune. Therefore, it seems justified to claim that the interest of the local community is ingrained in local development, the main beneficiary of which is definitely this particular community. Further discussion requires this concept to be explained in more detail.

3. Local development and its management

Local development represents a commonly used category, both in professional literature and in the everyday practice of territorial self-governments. The category seems simple, but in fact it is complex and has several meanings. It covers components included in a certain set of similar or different, but interrelated elements of reality, the processes altering this reality and the ideas shaping it, the current and potential significance of which is very large for the broadly understood quality of life of societies and the functioning of ecosystems. There are two major approaches of a complementary nature to local development understanding. Therefore, they do not represent different ideas about the concept itself, but the indispensable and supplementary ways of its perception.

The first consists in referring to local development as desirable, positive transformations in the quantity, quality and structure of properties characteristic for local social and territorial composition (the so called local system), which features its typical set of economic, spatial and cultural attributes, where the social element expresses its own needs and its hierarchy of values.³ There are many possibilities for specifying such a social and territorial composition, however, while aspiring to capture the practical applicability of the discussed concept, it has been commonly accepted that it is the commune itself which represents such a composition. This approach, although being a simplification of the problem's complexity – e.g. owing to the fact that communal borders are not often the same as local systems defined by diversified research methods – is still regarded as a necessary one.

The second manner of local development perception consists in referring to it as one of the complementary ideas associated with the construction of a new contemporary society model, as well as the new concepts related to social and economic development which the society is supposed to follow. Therefore, in this case it does not only cover communal development processes, or even their overall supra-local dimension, but involves establishing, from the level of state or even international systems, such conditions which could facilitate creating, activating and the rational application of all local types of capital. Local development is the concept of all national or regional economy development creation in a global dimension. At this point it is worth remembering that such a perception of the path of local development has its own history which is closely related to investigating alternatives for a uniform social and economic development model, established by large economic entities functioning in the liberal conditions of an imperfect market⁴. The result of such an investigation manifests itself as the contemporary global consensus

³The review of different ways for defining local development may be found e.g. in: [Sztando 1998, pp. 12–29].

⁴The origins and contemporary significance of local development concept may be analyzed based on [Pietrzyk 1997].

in social and economic sciences regarding the optimal combination of the local development concept and supra-local processes, such as the spatial concentration of capital, corporate sector development, unification, international division of labour, globalization and other related processes. Regardless of the accepted, local or supra-local observation perspective, local development always represents the process of multidimensional changes within a large set of diversified elements, which altogether make up a contemporary society, economy and environment, as well as even more numerous interrelations between these elements. Both the elements and their relations persist, among others, under different influences on the part of communal self-government. In this way it fulfils its mission, consisting in managing these elements and their relations in a direct or indirect, total or partial manner, aimed at accomplishing the set goal in the form of local development. In other words, the mission is carried out by means of local development management. The number, complexity and alterations of the above elements and their links, transformations and negative influence of the different factors present in their environment, and also the changing criteria for development evaluation, require the methods' optimization in order to accomplish the goal by means of strategic management application. Local development strategic management represents a complex process focused on obtaining, processing and generating information by local authorities, the final effect of which are their own decisions and decisions made by entities independent from them, which result in the due local system's proper development in the long-term perspective.

4. Local development planning vs. social responsibility

Strategic planning of local development constitutes a component of local development strategic management and covers activities aimed at defining local development strategy, which represents a cohesive set of goals for harmonious communal development, as well as synchronized and coordinated activities which are supposed to facilitate such goals' accomplishment⁵. These activities are of a diagnostic, prognostic, analytical and planning nature. The combination of the previously presented information, together with the core concept of strategic planning, brings about the question of whether the problem of communal authorities social responsibility occurs at this stage of local development strategic planning. The arguments presented below indicate that the answer must be positive.

The conceptualization of local development strategy means making long-term, and bearing the gravest consequences, decisions referring to social, economic and environmental evolutions in communal structures. Having considered the above

⁵ Among literature references characterizing this type of planning in a complex way the following may be quoted: [Caulfield, Schultz 1989; Gordon 1993; Kot 2003; Nowińska 1997; Noworól 2007; Wysocka, Koziński 1998].

mentioned subjectivity of the local community and the servitude-oriented role of local authorities towards it, and also the discussed responsibility resulting from these properties, the validity and substantiality of the community's active participation in the process of strategy construction is beyond any doubt. It is only then, that the accepted guidelines for local system development may become coherent with its expectations and needs. Additionally, it is only then that the maximization of local community particular subsets' involvement in the implementation of a commonly created strategic development plan, is possible. The above mentioned participation has been extensively reflected in literature⁶, and the methodology of its application is relatively large. It mainly covers local community opinion surveys (e.g. questionnaires) and social consultancy (e.g. strategic workshops), while the overall planning process involving local community participation is referred to as collaborative planning.

However, the real life practice of Polish local self-governments offers numerous examples of local community disregarding, or its incorrect involvement in, the process of strategic planning. This is not the case of missing objective possibilities, but a purposeful or unintentional ignorance presented by local authorities in this area of their responsibility towards the local community. Such a situation may, at first sight, seem much less severe than other occurring manifestations of social irresponsibility by local authorities, such as e.g. corruption, severe actions of abandonment, or incorrect and, at the same time, costly decisions resulting from failure in fulfilling their professional duties, or an unacceptable lack of indispensable knowledge. However, the reality may present quite the reverse picture. This happens because the listed failures are most frequently of a fragmentary nature from the perspective of overall self-government activities, or they occur only incidentally and periodically, while their negative effects may usually be removed or compensated. Additionally, they are investigated by institutional and social control organs and therefore the probability of their elimination increases along with their duration time. In the meantime, the local community's isolation from the strategic planning processes may result in much more serious, negative effects, since there is a potential danger of lacking compatibility between a wide range of long lasting communal activities and expectations, the capacity and actual needs of their social beneficiaries. There is also the threat of losing the long-term capacity for developing and applying local human capital in numerous public activities. This reduces the probability of missing out on the endogenous and exogenous opportunities and protecting against threats originating from the same areas. In the highly probable scenario of the occurrence of the majority or all of these negative effects, this may result in the significant and long lasting slowdown of the local development rate, together with the accompanying loss of its sustainability attribute. Such an effect may turn out, beyond any comparison, to

⁶ Recommendations in this subject matter are included in e.g.: [*Guideline...* 1994; Healey 1997; Schöler, Walther 2003; Ziółkowski 2000].

be more dangerous than the cumulative results of many of the faults listed above, and therefore the activities which result in its occurrence should be regarded as a serious infringement of social responsibility.

Based on the author's analysis presented at the beginning, it is clear that in Polish self-government practice one deals with a certain set of typical irregularities occurring in the process of local development strategic planning, which may be defined as the insufficiencies in social responsibility of communal authorities. Their main component is a total refraining from the planning model, in which a community plays the subjective role for the benefit of becoming an object in the planning process. Such a situation has a simple structure, and in view of its already discussed effects, does not require further description. Much more complex situations, at the same time requiring both identification and analysis, are those, in the process of which, local authorities enter the path of collaborative planning, but keep following it in such a manner that the degree of the set targets' accomplishment arouses grave reservations. Selected examples are presented below.

The first one refers to strategic workshops in the form of working meetings with the participation of strategy creating experts, self-government authorities and the administration, local community representatives and other decision makers capable of influencing key conditions of territorial objective development, aimed at both its development strategy and its implementation system modelling. The social responsibility deficiencies of local authorities manifest themselves in the form of the incorrect selection of their participants. Despite the fact that the above mentioned professional literature may be regarded as a sufficiently helpful source of support in this matter, the practical construction of the list of appointed or invited individuals still presents numerous deficiencies. This usually results from the fact that local authorities are not ready to confront publically a standpoint, presented by the other self-government community members, which is contradictory to their own. It also happens that this results from the incorrect evaluation of some organizations and individuals significance in local development. The wrong choice of participants, together with the frequently applied rule "the absent cannot be right" diminishes the level of the working team's representativeness for the benefit of the social, economic and environmental sphere of the local economy. This reduces the scope and precision of the expected, primary product of workshops in the form of specified and valued key communal properties and its major development factors, the vision of its desirable state, development targets, as well as the sets of possible to implement projects aimed at the accomplishment of these targets. Additionally, it reduces the secondary product components made up of new, development oriented initiatives which came up during workshops, the strategic consensus of local scene partners, their desire to cooperate, new concepts for their strategic cooperation, as well as the initiation of new, strategic partnerships between self-government authorities and other entities. Taken together, it reduces the quality of the strategy itself, but also decreases its probable scope and its implementation efficiency.

The second manifestation of the absence of social responsibility in activities performed by communal authorities, refers to the organization of the above mentioned workshops. It consists in reducing them to relatively short meetings featuring a low level of substantiality, held in an inadequate place and time, with participants who are not properly prepared for the task. It also happens that, as the result of the absence of grouping in a simultaneous discussion, or some other form of workshop, a cooperation with too many participants is attempted and moderated, which obviously turns out to be impossible. This type of behaviour contradicts the idea of undertaking social consultancy and may not be regarded as meeting the methodological, political or even moral obligation for carrying out a proper social consultancy process. Its effects are similar to those indicated above.

Despite the profound importance of workshops, it is also socially irresponsible to consider strategic workshops as an alternative to all other consultancy oriented efforts. Such an approach is incorrect due to the fact that even the best possible workshops do not guarantee obtaining results representative for all the local community. For this reason, in order to improve the degree of such representativeness and upgrade it to an acceptable level, workshops should be supplemented by complementary methods. This is necessary, because technically it is only possible for a group of a few hundred people, at the maximum, to participate in them, while the actual population of local communities may amount to several hundred thousands. As a result, even if all participants are not only formally, but also practically and substantially, entitled to represent particular parts of the local community, it is still never certain that the output of their efforts is representative for an overall community. Public opinion surveys, electronic dialogue, direct interviews and focused group interviews, while conducted in small local communities, at village inhabitants' or residential area members' meetings, as well as at any other collective meetings involving local inhabitants, are regarded as the most appropriate (eliminating the above mentioned doubts), supplementary methods to be used in present day practice.

The particularly appalling example of breaking local authorities commitments, associated with their social responsibility, is the use of strategy as an instrument in their election campaign. The process of local development strategy conceptualization frequently becomes an object of interest for the local community. In its course the choices of projects are made which become the subject matter of great interest for many of its members. For this reason it receives wide coverage in the media independent from local self-government, but also in the media represented by local self-government in communicating with its citizens, such as e.g. the Internet website or a community magazine. Besides, the participation of numerous self-government partners in the planning process has an intensifying effect on these relations. Some local authorities' representatives are fully aware of that, and following the motivation of obtaining possibly the largest social support in the approaching elections, initiate the procedure of creating a communal development strategic plan in the final stage of their term of office. This is accompanied by such an organization of the overall

work as to accomplish possibly the most extensive media effect and, at the same time, reflect the expectations of the largest part of the electorate. In the majority of cases their final product, despite its formal name, is not a strategy at all, but a set of tasks (wishes) impossible to perform (fulfil) in the assumed time by implementing the available resources, sometimes even contradictory to the concept of local development. This is used as an instrument of election campaign aimed at building trust in the current authorities, to emphasize their involvement in social dialogue regarding matters of the utmost importance for local inhabitants, their complex plan for meeting the broad spectrum of social needs and, therefore, suggest that these particular authorities should be elected for the next term of office. It is, however, not possible to use it as a fully valuable tool for strategic management, owing to the methodological and substantive drawbacks, since the authorities which perceive the role of a strategy only from the perspective of elections, do not usually manifest any such intentions afterwards.

The planning behaviour of local authorities, which is contradictory to the concept of social responsibility, does not only refer to workshop procedures. Finalizing the presentation of these examples, it is worth indicating those which occur during surveys conducted quite often in the process of strategy construction. This research technique, very popular in Polish practice, is only seemingly a simple one. The following factors are the key ones for the success of its application: correct preparation of questions and available answers, proper selection of the survey sample, full involvement of respondents and the skilful analysis of results. However, it is specifically in these areas that mistakes and discontinuances do occur most often. Among them the most frequently committed ones are: incorrectly phrased questions (from the research objective point of view), phrasing questions in a way which is not clear for the respondents, leaving the latter without any support of a trained opinion pollster while filling in a long and complicated survey, and also using an unrepresentative research sample of respondents in the survey. Additionally, survey results' manipulation represents the most significant distortion of opinion survey research idea, very distant from the social responsibility rules of a strategic planning subject matter. Such attempts may only be motivated by the desire to find arguments for the compliance of social expectations with the initially prepared concepts of communal self-government activities.

5. Final remarks

As results from the information presented above, the importance of the social responsibility of local authorities in the process of local development strategic planning is very extensive, while the Polish practice of self-government performance in this matter provides insufficient examples of local authorities behaviour. Therefore, there are justifiable reasons for undertaking research primarily aimed at the thorough recognition of the problem and with the secondary objective focused on constructing

instruments for its reduction. They should become an element of a broader research stream devoted to social responsibility issues in overall self-government activities, not only in Poland. It does not, by any means, limit itself only to Poland and the sphere of planning activities.

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PLANOWANIE STRATEGICZNE ROZWOJU LOKALNEGO A SPOŁECZNA ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚĆ GMINNYCH WŁADZ. POLSKIE DOŚWIADCZENIA

Streszczenie: Artykuł jest poświęcony problematyce społecznej odpowiedzialności polskich władz lokalnych w procesie planowania strategicznego rozwoju lokalnego. W początkowej jego części autor definiuje pojęcie tej odpowiedzialności. Następnie omawia kategorie rozwoju lokalnego oraz zarządzania nim, a także prezentuje relacje między planowaniem strategicznym rozwoju lokalnego a ideą społecznej odpowiedzialności. Empiryczna część artykułu zawiera wyniki badań autora przedstawione w formie przykładów ilustrujących te nieprawidłowości w działaniach lokalnych władz prowadzonych podczas budowy strategii rozwoju lokalnego, które mogą być uznane za braki owej odpowiedzialności.

Słowa kluczowe: Polska, społeczna odpowiedzialność, rozwój lokalny, zarządzanie strategiczne, planowanie, gmina.