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## Barriers for Local Development Strategic Management Resulting from Personal Qualities of Local Authorities

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## **BARRIERS FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT RESULTING FROM PERSONAL QUALITIES OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

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**Key words:** commune, local development, development strategy, management barriers.

### **A b s t r a c t**

The article discusses the problem of barriers in local development strategic management related to personal qualities of local authorities. In its initial parts the author presents the rationale for their research as well methods he has applied. Then, discusses the key article categories: local development and local development strategic management. Next he lists all identified groups of barriers, referring to such management. In the main part of study, he focuses on these which refer to personal qualities of local authorities. The article results from several years of practice and research conducted by the Author in the domain of local development strategy conceptualization and implementation.

## **BARIERY ZARZĄDZANIA STRATEGICZNEGO ROZWOJEM LOKALNYM WYNIKAJĄCE Z OSOBOWYCH CECH LOKALNYCH WŁADZ**

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**Słowa kluczowe:** gmina, rozwój lokalny, strategia rozwoju, bariery zarządzania.

### **A b s t r a k t**

W artykule omówiono problem barier zarządzania strategicznego rozwojem lokalnym związanych z cechami osobowymi lokalnych władz. We wstępie autor prezentuje przesłanki ich badania, a także zastosowane przez niego metody. Następnie omawia najważniejsze pojęcia: rozwój lokalny i zarządzanie strategiczne rozwojem lokalnym, oraz wymienia wszystkie zidentyfikowane grupy barier wspomnianego zarządzania. W głównej części opracowania koncentruje się na tych, które wynikają z cech osobowych władz lokalnych. Artykuł jest wynikiem kilkunastoletniej praktyki i badań prowadzonych przez autora w zakresie conceptualizacji i wdrażania strategii rozwoju lokalnego.

## Introduction

Contemporary Polish local self-governments exert significant influence on many occurring social, economic and environmental processes, as well as on objects located in the area of communes. They frequently initiate such processes and create these objects. The results of such influence are significant enough to refer to local self-governments as the most important creators of multidimensional evolution in local structures. What is more, the discussed effects often extend, by far, the communal borders and are reflected in transformations of other territorial systems therefore, for this reason, they may be referred to as factors or components of their development. In this perspective it seems founded to present an opinion that they exert an important influence on regional, national or even international transformations.

Such knowledge encourages to focus attention on decision making processes carried out by local authorities, as well as on the effects of these decisions since the structure, directions, scope and also final evaluation of the discussed changes depend on these processes. It mainly refers to decisions resulting in long-term, deep and diversified effects. There are many, elaborated and accepted by science, concepts for decisions' optimization, including these made by public units. Among them an eminent position is taken by strategic management. Additionally, important progress has been made in adapting such management rules for the needs of communes, particularly with reference to their development strategy conceptualization. Numerous publications, devoted to these problems, were also issued, both abroad (the interesting examples are as follows: BRYSON 1995, CAULFIELD SCHULTZ 1989, GORDON 1993, 1994, HEALEY 1997, SCHÖLER, WALTHER 2003) and in Poland (the following examples may be quoted: BINIECKI, SZCZUPAK 2004, NOWIŃSKA 1997, NOWORÓL 2007, WYSOCKA, KOZIŃSKI 1998, ZIÓLKOWSKI 2000). Therefore, it may be expected that in view of local and supra-local high rank results of communal self-government activities and the availability of widely recognized recommendations, strategic management – in the full understanding of this concept – will spread and become common practice for them with its quality presenting high standards. Unfortunately, the Author's knowledge and experience gained as the result of scientific-research work and academic teaching practice, in the process of constructing and implementing development strategies for several dozens of communes, districts and regions, while conducting many trainings and workshops about territorial development planning for self-government authorities, as well as in the process of performing the function of a self-government legislative body member, altogether provide a multitude of arguments confirming that a real life practice is different. It happens so, because the large majority of Polish communes do not carry out

numerous activities which constitute the component of strategic management, while in those communes where such activities are undertaken, their realisation does usually not extend beyond the planning phase. Additionally, the quality of some, or all of these activities implementation is, by far, lower than the one recommended by professional literature (more on the subject in: SZTANDO 2008, pp. 193–202). In other words, strategic management of local development by local self-governments, understood in line with the contemporary scientific output, occurs quite rarely. The less often it occurs the smaller social and economic potential a given commune has at its disposal. Such situation results in many negative consequences, among which the most important factors are: lower, than possible to accomplish, efficiency and effectiveness of self-government activities, as well as its non-optimal range, which results in lower speed of local development and supra-local developmental processes. Similar observations are presented by other researchers (e.g.: KŁOSOWSKI, WARDA 2001, pp. 63–75, PYTLAK 2011, pp. 353–356, KOT 2003).

### **The purpose of research and methods used**

Therefore, there are justified and substantial reasons to investigate the real scale and structure of this phenomenon and later identify barriers occurring on the way to strategic management application in Polish local self-governments as well as the most important features of such barriers, and also the consequences of their occurrence. Improprieties in the construction and implementation of the strategy of Polish municipalities have already been partially explored. However, the process of identifying causes of these improprieties (mentioned above barriers) is only just starting. Therefore the knowledge in this subject matter, in an objective meaning, is unfortunately missing. Obtaining it will help in finding theoretical solutions which, after their practical verification and introducing improvements, will facilitate such management to become common and, in this way, enhance local and supra-local development. The Author focuses his attention on this particular research problem. Their first step is to identify the types of barriers of local development strategic management. On this basis, it will be able to carry out studies that provide answers to questions: what is their frequency of occurrence, what are their real sources, effects and how they can be effectively and efficiently eliminated. The hereby article aims at the presentation of identification results one of several such barriers groups. It was performed by processing the data collected by means of cause-result analysis and logical reduction methods. These data were:

1. The author's observations made by him in the years 1996–2013 during the construction of 59 development strategies of territorial self-government units<sup>1</sup>, particularly during the:

a. 105 full-day strategic workshops led by author with the participation of about 5 thousand participants,

b. about 300 working meetings with the authorities of self-government led by author and dedicated to shaping the final content development strategies.

2. Information collected by individual in-depth interviews conducted by the author with 155 members of decisive and executive bodies of self-government units mentioned in subsection 1, in which development strategies have been drawn up in the years 2004–2013.

3. The content of 399 local law acts as the key for local development strategic management accepted in all communities mentioned in subsection 1, such as: budget, long-term investment programme, waste management plan, environment protection plan, promotion plan, public safety plan, ecological education plan, programme of cooperation with non-governmental organizations and entities engaged in public utility activities, local development plan, long-term financial schedule, the study of conditions and directions for spatial management, local spatial management plan, revitalization programme (usually referring to part of a town), the plan for spatial arrangement of farming areas, education development programme, local economic policy programme, development plans for particular villages.

## **The concept of local development strategic management**

The construction of local development strategic management category requires prior explanation of the local development concept importance since, in spite of its common usage, it is often incorrectly understood or partially misunderstood. It happens so, because the concept itself is a complex one covering a multitude of meanings. It should be applied by means of considering

<sup>1</sup> Regional development strategies for: dolnośląskie (2001, 2005); district development strategies for: jeleniogórski (2000, 2006, 2007), zgorzelecki (2000, 2004), polkowicki (2000, 2008), przeworski (2007), bolesławiecki (2000); commune development strategies for: Dzierżoniów (1996), Dziwnów (2008), Jelenia Góra (1998, 2000, 2004), Nowogrodzic (2001, 2011), Starachowice (1997), Wojcieszów (2004), Wronki (1998), Bogatynia (2006, 2009), Bolków (2004), Chocianów (2001), Jelcz-Laskowice (2007), Łądek Zdrój (1998), Lubawka (2001), Pieńsk (2000), Polkowice (2000/1, 2002/3, 2007/8, 2010), Przemków (2008, 2010), Stronie Śląskie (2013), Świerzawa (2004), Węgliniec (1998, 2007), Długołęka (2011), Dobromierz (1999), Grębocice (2001, 2006), Janowice Wielkie (2002), Jeżów Sudecki (2000), Łomazy (2009), Piszczac (2008), Mały Płock (2009), Marciszów (2003, 2010), Podgórzyn (2000), Radków (2008), Radwanice (2001), Rokitno (2009), Rudna (2004), Sulików (2005), Urzędów (2008), Waganiec (2007), Wądroże Wielkie (2008).

jointly the elements of a certain set composed of similar or different, but related to each other, components of real life practice, processes illustrating its transformations and the idea of its creation, which present or potential significance for the broadly understood life quality of societies and ecosystems functioning, turns out to be very high. Following this path of reasoning two ways of local development understanding may be distinguished which do not exclude each other, but even happen to be strictly complementary for each other.

The first approach, which may be defined as the narrow one, consists in perceiving local development as desirable and positive quantitative, qualitative and structural properties of local social and territorial composition, made up of economic, spatial and cultural attributes which characterize it, where the social component expresses its own needs and hierarchy of values. Having applied necessary simplifications, this composition is most often identified with a commune, despite the fact that, according to L. Wojtasiewicz, many components of development do not balance themselves in a local scale (WOJTASIEWICZ 1996, p. 14). The above mentioned Author's definition, quoted in professional literature, may serve as the example of such local development perception, according to which local development refers to complex qualitative transformations occurring in a given area and related to its inhabitants life quality level and local economic entities functioning (WOJTASIEWICZ 1990, p. 38). On the other hand, B. Gruchman claims that local development refers to the development of production forces, mainly industry, and also economic and social infrastructure in a given location and areas which surround it (GRUCHMAN 1990, p. 117), while R. Brol defines local development as harmonious and systematic activities of local community, local authorities and other entities functioning in a commune, aimed at establishing new and improving the existing functional communal advantages, at creating favourable conditions for local economy and providing spatial and economical order (BROL 1998, p. 11).

The second approach to local development understanding – a broad one – consists in perceiving it as one of complementary ideas for establishing new model of contemporary society and new concepts of social and economic development, which the society is supposed to follow. In this understanding it not only refers to developmental processes occurring in diversified local systems, or even to their supra-local “final output”, but to creating such conditions, from state level, or even international arrangements, which facilitate establishing, making available and applying rationally the overall local capital. Local development represents here a partial alternative for a uniform development model created by large economic entities functioning in liberal conditions of an imperfect market. It is a partial alternative because in the

process of long lasting, scientific debate consensus was reached regarding the concept of local development optimization, also called remote development, combined with supra-local processes such as capital spatial concentration, corporations development, unification, international work division, globalization etc., which jointly form the, so called, top-down development. Statements by I. Pietrzyk may serve as the example of such local development perception, who claims that local development means contradicting extreme liberalism and conciliation between entrepreneurship and inter-human solidarity, improving market defects and imperfect information, encouraging social initiatives and taking advantage of overall local developmental potential, stimulating local actors to focus on their "own" development programme and obtaining synergic effects which strengthen the general growth dynamics (PIETRZYK 1997, pp. 89–90).

Both, in the first and second approach, local development represents the process of multidimensional changes in a large set of diversified components constituting altogether a contemporary society, economy and environment, as well as even more extensive relations between these components. All these elements and their mutual relations are influenced, among others, by public entities established in order to shape the mentioned above changes in such way that their evaluation could be positive and therefore they could be regarded as developmental processes. It means that these entities perform their mission consisting in direct or indirect and total or partial management of these components and their relations so that the goal in the form of local and supra-local development is obtained. In other words their mission is to manage local development. Having considered the large number, complexity and changeability of the above components and their relations, changeability and negative influence of diversified factors originating in their environment, as well as the changeability of development evaluation criteria, it seems quite easy to reach the conclusion that an optimum method to accomplish this goal is by means of strategic management application. Owing to the described above way of local development category perception, and the presence of more than one type of entities managing it, two respective definitions of local development strategic management may be presented. According to the first one it is represented by a complex process of obtaining, processing and generating information by local authorities (commune, district) the final effect of which are their own decisions and the decisions of entities they cover, resulting in the development of a local system characteristic for them (commune, district) in a long time perspective. As far as the second approach is concerned, it is the complex process of obtaining, processing and generating information by supra-local authorities (regional, state, international) the final effect of which are their own decisions, as well as the decisions of entities they cover, resulting

in common application of local development processes in the due administrative area. As it has already been illustrated, strategic management objectives, referring to local development of particular public entities, are quite concurrent. Differences refer to spatial scale of influence and – partially – to the applied tools. Commune or district authorities aim at the development of one local system, while the state government is focused on the development of all local systems and on obtaining supra-local synergic effects which may stem from local potential enhancement. Instruments used by all types of authorities cover both, the tools for local development direct creation (e.g. infrastructural investments) and the tools used for creating favourable conditions stimulating such development (e.g. legal), however, in case of local authorities one deals with a more extensive involvement of the first type of tools.

### **Barriers for local development strategic management resulting from personal qualities of local authorities**

Barriers for strategic management of local development may be discussed in the context of both, supra-local and local authorities functioning. However, owing to the scope in the merits of the hereby article attention will be focused exclusively on the latter ones. At the level of local authorities these barriers take the form of all possible factors which are crucial and, at the same time, influence strategic management processes negatively which results in their incorrectness or absence. A few, listed below, groups of such barriers may be distinguished:

1. methodological barriers, i.e. faults of local development strategic management concept consisting in e.g.: their non-adjustment to the capacity and needs of communal authorities representing small social and economic potential;
2. legal barriers, i.e. imperfections of the self-government legal system constructed by state authorities;
3. barriers in cooperation between local self-government and strategic cooperation partners, such as e.g.: their perception of the environment exclusively in terms of their own interests, as well as the lack of knowledge regarding potential advantages of such cooperation;
4. barriers resulting from insufficiencies of local social capital and local human capital – e.g. lack of social involvement in the construction and implementation of communal development strategy;
5. information barriers reducing the availability of data indispensable for strategic management, such as e.g.: imperfections of public statistics;
6. financial barriers limiting the potential of communal instruments for strategic management below its optimum level;



7. human resources barriers referring mainly to insufficient qualifications of self-government administration staff;

8. barriers in standards, i.e. discouraging information and behaviours of other public entities;

9. support barriers covering mainly imperfections in the quality of performed services for local self-governments by consultancy entities and weaknesses in relations between research centres and communal self-governments;

10. barriers in local development policy conducted by state government and the European Union authorities consisting in incomplete, incoherent activities or other disadvantages;

11. barriers resulting from personal qualities of local authorities.

The scope of further discussion, following the objective of the hereby study, will be limited to the last of the above mentioned groups. With reference to research presented at the beginning of the article, the below discussed barriers were identified as the most frequently occurring ones and related to personal qualities of local authorities, i.e. people functioning as members of legislative or executive bodies in communes.

The first barrier of this type refers to lack of proper knowledge. Many representatives of local authorities do not represent the adequate knowledge about strategic management of local development, which refers not only to management processes, but also to potential advantages that could result from them, both for economy, local community, communal environment, and for themselves.

The second barrier, undoubtedly often related to the first one, is the absence of trust for all long-term plans. The aversion of local authorities to making plans in long time perspective frequently stems from their bad experiences associated with long-term planning which they were a part of in the previous social and economic system. These plans, in many cases, were not executed in line with their assumptions, and even more often they were not reflecting the real needs of local communities at all. Additionally, their implementation was frequently superficial or even pretended. They also played political functions and focused on supra-local targets ignoring real, local needs.

Another barrier of the discussed type refers to the aversion towards the risk of management processes negative evaluation in the future. Accepting and making development strategy available for the public, especially at the beginning of the new self-government term of office, is observed as equal to specifying distinctive criteria which may be commonly applied to later, multi-dimensional local authorities verification. It is relatively easy to decide which part of obligations included in the strategy, e.g. planned investments, or organizational solutions, turned out, in fact, true and which were left at their planning stage. Each strategy, provided correctly prepared, represents the set

of concurrently numerous, long-term, diversified, significant obligations, and also declarations addressed to local community, local businesses, and frequently also to external cooperation partners. In practice, the mentioned above verification and making its negative results publicly available are the centre of interest for those of the above addressees who do not accept both management processes and (more often) the local authorities in power.

The next barrier also refers to the aversion towards risking negative evaluation of management processes, but in this case it is these processes which occurred in the past, or take place currently. The process of local development strategy construction requires social consultancy to be carried out, however, in order to obtain the objectives for the sake of which such consultancy is performed, at least some of the activities they cover have to be of an open nature and take the form of e.g., so called, strategic workshops. In many cases it means an automatic involvement of opposition groups, as well as local scene actors representing only themselves, who are at the same time dissatisfied with the currently functioning authorities. In consequence is means allowing them to criticize local authorities publicly, which is often reflected by the media.

Another frequently occurring barrier, related to personal qualities of local authorities, is their low inclination to delegate decision competencies in cases of strategic importance. One of the key properties of the participation type of strategic planning, considered by science as the optimal one, is the involvement of social, economic and political partners in the decision making process regarding directions for future local economy development. It means that correct strategic planning results in the need to give up some of the powers by current executive and legislative bodies, and mainly the majority of powers held by the latter, in specifying strategic and operational local development goals, as well as in defining projects which are supposed to help in obtaining them. In practice, however, this process does not always follow the theoretical assumptions. Some of the mentioned above local authorities representatives do not respect this idea, or accept it only in a very limited scope. Such standpoint is based on one, or two following attitudes – whether justified or not is a matter of opinion. According to the first attitude cooperating partners are not capable of bringing in added value to strategic planning and their participation may, at the most, decrease the quality of planning effects, while the second attitude claims that their intentions are of destructive nature. In the latter case the crucial issue is the concern about the introduction of such goals and tasks to development strategy planning, by the planning partners, which are characterized by particularly low implementation capacity, in order to emphasize negative evaluation of both implementation strategy and local authorities themselves after some time, e.g. in the final part of their term of office. Apart

from the above reasons the aversion towards delegating decision making competencies sometimes stems from personal qualities of individuals responsible for performing functions in an executive body. It refers to the strong feeling of possessed powers and more or less conscious desire to keep all prerogatives resulting from it.

The sixth of the discussed barriers refers to weak inclination of local authorities to carry out optional tasks and take responsibility for them. The participation of different local community representatives in the strategic participation oriented programming process (more on the topic: SZTANDO 2010, pp. 99–110) is, almost always, connected with their desire to introduce such development goals to strategic planning which are not directly connected with the implementation of obligatory tasks listed in the Acts regulating communal activities. These pursuits have two pillars. The first of them refers to the general competence resulting from Art. 6, par. 1 of the Act on communal self-government<sup>2</sup> following which local self-government is capable of carrying out tasks in diversified areas of public activities on condition they are not legally restricted to other entities. The second pillar refers to high intensity of needs characteristic for social, economic and environmental sphere of local economy, which according to legal regulations should be fulfilled by other entities than communal self-government, but the degree of their fulfilment is currently significantly unsatisfactory for their beneficiaries. In such situations different proposals, for communal involvement in processes aimed at providing missing services and goods, occur based on the mentioned above general competence. They reflect the desire to obtain social and economic sustainable development in a commune, combined with distrust in quick and independent, from communal self-government, increase in the degree of the above needs fulfilment. They also reflect the perception of a strategy as the plan aimed at the development of territorial social-economic-natural system represented by a commune and not only the programme of executing, by communal self-government, just the tasks resulting from the Act. In practice it happens that these proposals are faced with the lack of acceptance from local authorities. Three main reasons of their negative attitude may be distinguished which are most often concurrent and of equal proportions. The first refers to limitations in financial resources at the disposal of a commune which frequently become an obstacle in performing its own, obligatory activities. The second reason is the aversion of a commune and self-government structures towards undertaking these additional tasks which are not obligatory. The third reason is lack of acceptance for taking the risk of becoming responsible for partial or overall

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<sup>2</sup> Art. 6, par. 1 of the Act dated 8th March 1999 on communal self-government (Journal of Laws of 2001, no. 142, item 1591).

failure in carrying out optional activities and public criticism which will most probably be associated with it.

One of the most important of the discussed barriers is the inclination of local authorities towards conflicts of political nature. Self-government practice indicates their relatively frequent occurrence inside legislative bodies, or between legislative and executive ones in communal self-governments. The main components of such situation are extensive differences between members of these bodies regarding past experiences and their evaluation, values, visions of the future and its implementation programmes or just current struggle to win electorate votes. Lack of agreement inside self-government bodies makes it very difficult to undertake strategic planning initiatives, as well as efficient and effective development strategy implementation. In the conditions of intense conflict it is impossible to obtain consensus in key stages of strategic management, i.e. in the evaluation of current situation, in the identification of factors and determinants for future development, in programming directions and methods for local system changes, and also in current execution and monitoring of strategic decisions. Time periods for taking decisions become extended, some of the indispensable decisions are not undertaken at all, opportunities for implementing these already taken are purposefully limited, facts are deliberately interpreted in a wrong way, and also many other confrontation oriented moves or omissions are made. Even a low intensity conflict may significantly reduce the desired effects of activities included in strategic management.

The above barrier is often related to the next one represented by the negation of achievements accomplished by previous authorities. Periodical elections constituting the fundament of democratic political systems may result in a certain group coming to power which does not accept directions of activities followed by its predecessors. It also happens at the level of communal self-governments. One of many practical consequences, which results from such situation, is starting all over again with defining strategic directions of development for the local system, accompanied by a concurrent discontinuance of some tasks aimed at obtaining goals approved by predecessors. If one disregards the issue of strategic changes validity, since they may be quite justified, one should accept that they always mean the violation of strategic management processes continuation. There are known cases of rejecting the already existing strategic plans, created by the previous political option, which resulted not just from lack of approval for their content, but from extended ambitions of the new authorities to create their own ones. Such situations often result from establishing their own publicity.

The last, ninth barrier refers to treating strategy as an instrument in an election campaign. The process of local development strategy conceptualization

often becomes the subject matter of interest for local community. In its course certain choices are made regarding projects constituting issues of great interest for many of its members. For this reason it is commented by both, the media independent from local self-government, and by means of using communication channels with citizens such as e.g. the Internet web site or a communal magazine. Additionally, the participation of numerous local self-government partners in planning process does intensify such relations. Some local authorities representatives are fully aware of that and having in mind the objective to win, possibly the largest, social support in the approaching elections initiate the communal development strategic plan construction procedure in the final phase of their term of office. At the same time all work is organized in the way to obtain the biggest possible coverage in the media and reflect, in this work results, as many expectations of the electorate as possible. In the majority of situations their final product, despite its formal name, it is not the strategy, but the set of tasks (wishes) impossible to perform (execute) in the assumed time span and having used the available means, sometimes even contradictory to the concept of local development. It is used as an instrument in an election campaign aimed at winning trust for current authorities as such, since they get involved in an active social dialogue, focused on cases which are most important for local inhabitants and because they offer a complex plan for meeting a wide spectrum of social needs which, for this reason, should be given a chance of another term of office. It is, however, not possible to use it as a full quality instrument for strategic management due to its methodological and substantial faults and, what is more, the authorities which perceive the role played by a strategy only from the elections perspective, after they are over, quite often do not manifest such intentions at all.

### **Final remarks**

The significance of presented above barriers is crucial. They are of superior nature in relation to all the other ten groups. Such evaluation is justified by the fact that even elimination or extensive reduction of all the other barriers, accompanied by concurrent and lasting intensification of the discussed ones, will not result in proper application of local development strategic management by a given self-government. If local authorities are not motivated to take advantage of such method in executing their powers, or find themselves under the influence of contradictory motivation, then the whole range of other factors, facilitating the discussed type of management, will not bring about its application.

Such situation has its dire, negative consequences described in the introduction to the hereby article. Therefore it is important to undertake research focused on the presented barriers and their sources, and also the effects of their occurrence. Information obtained in this way will allow for searching such methods which could eliminate them effectively and this is extremely important for taking full advantage of the majority of opportunities brought about by the idea of local development, democracy, decentralization and territorial self-government.

Translated by AUTHORS

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