

Agnieszka Pawłowska

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Budowanie demokracji wspólnotowej w Polsce

SOME THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

The contemporary democratic states pass through the crisis of trust in the political authorities. It is manifested in the common conviction that the decision-makers – although legitimised in all elections – are no longer representatives of common will but they operate in the "cross-roads" of contradictory group interests, trying to satisfy these, which are crucial for preserving their political power. It is no longer representative democracy but "interests" democracy (sometimes called consociational democracy) where no voters but lobbies are represented.

This conviction is strongly confirmed by the unsatisfactory condition and operation of public services delivered by the state and sub-state agendas. Facing this situation, societies either try to organise social services by themselves (excellent examples are given by D. Osborn and T. Gaebler in the book *Reinventing Government*) or rebel against sub-state organisations as the citizens of European Community, powerless in front of EC bureaucracy.

The case of public administration in US captured by the "local forces" means not only the change of the pattern of public affairs management but it also results in the transformation of political pattern. Although in

the national politics we observe the social "retirement" or limitation to highly organised pressure groups, on the local level the revival of Athenian democracy ideals and principles of the New England town meetings is observable. These ideals and principles might be summed up as follows: "no citizen was excluded; all present were political equals; the meeting held final authority; officials were accountable; majority rule was unlimited; the focus was on local issues and the need for people to meet face to face".¹

These principles establish the system of communitarian and participatory democracy, where citizens determine their own collective identity and resolve "conflict in the absence of an independent ground through the participatory process of ongoing, proximate self-legislation and the creation of a political community capable of transforming dependent private individuals into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods".² Furthermore, the participation takes place through different kinds of institutions. The most important are:

- public debates,
- civil associations,
- issue groups.

Public debates constitute the very existence of the civil community. On the other hand, without the latter, public debate would be merely a forum of expressing individual interests. The functions of public debate in the communitarian democracy are: "the articulation of interests; bargaining and exchange, persuasion, agenda-setting, exploring mutuality, affiliation and affection, maintaining autonomy, witness and self-expressions, reformulation and reconceptualization, community building as the creation of public interests, common goods, and active citizens".³

Alexis de Tocqueville writes that the most democratic state is the one, where people brought into perfection the art of collective attaining the common wishes – i.e. by the **civil associations** – and they use this art most frequently.⁴ Tocqueville estimates this ability as crucial for development of every other sphere of social life. It is also indispensable for maintenance of the balance inside a democratic system. Civil associations constitute the counterbalance for domination of political parties and lawlessness of political power.⁵ Robert D. Putnam puts it otherwise

¹ R. Hollander, *Video Democracy*, Lomond 1985, p. 34.

² B. Barber, *Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age*, Berkeley 1984, p. 151.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

⁴ A. de Tocqueville, *O demokracji w Ameryce*, Warszawa 1976, p. 346.

saying that efficiency of democratic government is partly due to influence of civil associations on their members and on their social environment. Associations arm their members with a sense of solidarity and teach them how to put different aspirations together and cooperate for their achievement. Associations articulate and aggregate the social interests and make them visible for the outside world.⁶ We have to stress, that civil associations are indispensable for effective self-government on local level, which statement we try to prove next.

Issue groups – in contrast to interest groups, which "speak for a specific economic point of view" – "claim to speak for majority (they are concerned with the environment, abortion, taxes, feminism, local problems).⁷ The character of the issue groups determines the way they impose the pressure on public authorities – they do not bargain, as they fight not for solution of the problem but for the acceptance of certain values and principles. The presence of issue groups in political system determines the redefinition of public discussion between authorities and citizens.

The developing self-organization of the people, mostly on local level, their growing pressure to improve the operation of public administration and the louder voice in making decisions concerning the community, constitute the new pattern of social organization and public administration. This is the much-desired pattern of the designers of territorial reform in Poland. Is it attainable? This question is the subject of my reflections.

The crisis of trust in the political authorities is also manifested by the post-communist (neo-communist?) societies. Nevertheless, this social filling, which in its outlook resembles the filling of Western societies, has different grass-roots in the East. The former communist rulers had taken over the duty to deliver all social services, still they had never improved this duty properly. Social services – cheap or cost free – were insufficient and poorly performed. However, these obligations of the State towards the citizens gave the latter the substitute of social security feeling. This substitute could not be performed by the post-communist authorities, which – following the rules of the market – refused to subsidize social services in their previous scope. Summing it up, the communist governments were not socially recognized because they could

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁶ R. D. Putnam, *Demokracja w działaniu. Tradycje obywatelskie we współczesnych Włoszech*, Kraków 1995, p. 137.

⁷ Hollander, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

not cope with the social problems, the post-communist governments are not recognized, either, as they refuse to perform these obligations, which they cannot afford.

COMMUNITY AND THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Community – in legal terms – describes the people and area where they live.⁸ As a sociological term **community** describes the higher stage of social development, characterised by the large degree of social integration, capability of self-organisation in the name of common goals, the presence of the common social consciousness determined by local conditions.⁹ In other words, community means a sense of unity between people who constitute it.

What is the state of this special feeling in local Poland? It depends on the particular region and locality. Poland is visibly divided into four historically determined regions. These are territories annexed by the neighbors of Poland in the fall of the 18th century: the East captured by Russia, the West captured by Prussia and the South captured by Austro-Hungarian Empire. The fourth part is constituted by the territories of North-West Poland obtained after the Second World War. Regions mentioned above present their distinctiveness. The sense of community is strongly manifested in the regions, where the seeds of civil society (even in a form of cooperatives) were sown in the 19th century. These are the West and South-West territories of Poland, where people are rich and present the creative and innovative attitude towards their changing social and economic environment. Such attitudes are also visible in localities placed around huge agglomerations.¹⁰ These regions reveal their distinctiveness and aspirations to self-dependence and their inhabitants present a strong sense of common interest. They claim for economic, sometimes legal autonomy (Silesia, Kaszuby). They are also the cradle

⁸ It is important not to mix two terms: "community" and "local community". In the definition of "community" the territorial aspect is not important, as there are communities which do not occupy the defined territory (nomadic tribes, nations living in Diaspora). In these communities, the sense of sharing the same tradition and culture is crucial. On the other hand, local community can be only identified by the territory occupied by its members, as usually other, spiritual relationships are absent.

⁹ A. Piekara, *Samorząd terytorialny a kreatywność społeczna i rozwój lokalny*, [in:] *Samorząd drogą do demokracji*, eds. P. Buczkowski, R. Sowiński, Poznań 1994, s. 41.

¹⁰ B. Jałowiecki, *Polska lokalna*, „Przegląd Polityczny” 1993, no 21/22, p. 75.

of the projects aimed at regionalization of Poland. Nevertheless, when it comes to the smaller localities (municipal or village communities), the sense of community disappears as the result of "nationalization" of local community during the period of building the socialism in Poland. It was a process of expulsion of local values and social roles by the sub-local values and sub-local authorities. The local public administrations was nothing more than emissary of central administration. For several decades we have witnessed the social vacuum in the life of local communities. The elements of social regress on local level as well as the factors decisive for the reemergence of local groups are as follows:

- the absence of the local patterns of obligations, activity, participation in the local community,
- the absence of the true social leaders or the local community,
- the absence of the group identity (local groups do not function as social organisms),
- the political structure of local communities does not express the social diversity or competition but the monopoly of political power on the local stage,
- the conflicts of group interests are not articulated enough (they are actually blurred) and assume the pathological form by concentration in family make-up, coteries connected with posts occupied formally,
- thinking and acting in local categories were replaced by the pretense attitude towards central authority,
- the ethos of professions, which traditionally animated local activities were reduced in their social rank (for example teachers, doctors),
- the primary socialization does not create the sense of group identity and what's more, it is not a way of transmitting local history and tradition – this role was overtaken by the organizations controlled from above,
- the ethos of work and entrepreneurship for local community has fallen.¹¹

The after-war migrations determined the lack of locations inhabited through generations by the same social milieu. This aspect was further on increased by the emergence of the urban society in Poland (constant migrations from villages and small towns to big cities) and the labor-trade fragmentation of Polish society. It results in personal identification with rather labor than neighbor group which means that the civil behavior is

¹¹ A. Turska, *Wzorce normatywne jako czynnik kreacji lokalnych działań zbiorowych*, [in:] *Spoleczności lokalne w życiu publicznym*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 220-222; A. Turska, *Kreatywne i destrukcyjne czynniki aktywności grup lokalnych*, [in:] *Spoleczności lokalne. Teraźniejszość i przyszłość*, eds. B. Jałowiecki, K. Z. Sowa, P. Dudkiewicz, Warszawa 1989, p. 117.

determined by the labor-trade orientation, not the orientation towards the local community.¹² All this resulted in the lack of stable local social structure and absence of group identity. The long years of the direct attachment of individuals to the central authorities precluded the emergence of the local leaders and local patterns of social cooperation. The post-communist societies inherited the special attitude towards central authority – the mixture of contradictory feelings that only the central authority is in power to settle their problems or supply their needs with the negative attitude towards it as ineffective and dishonest.

COMMUNITARIAN DEMOCRACY AND THE REFORMS OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

It is difficult to estimate what social changes were brought about by the reform of local administration itself. I would be rather reserved in assessment of the results of the reform. Firstly, because it was exactly the reform of the local administration and not the local mentality. Secondly, social innovations are the hardest to initiate. It does not mean that the hitherto transformation of local structures was indifferent for the perception of the community and local government by the people. During the last six years (since May 27th 1990, when – for the first time after a fifty years' break – we had chosen local community authorities), we observe slow but regular decrease of confidence in the central government and constant growth of confidence in local governments.¹³ Transforming legal institutions and economic environment of the people means much to their consciousness of *living in a place*. Still, without proper education stressing the identity and values of community we will not reach the upper stage of social and political development – the community itself.

The reform of administration in Poland is aimed at the decentralization of the political system. In the further perspective it also means the decentralization of the interests as well as social conflicts. Is local community sufficiently prepared to articulate these interests and resolve conflicts?

¹² Z. Gilowska, *Polska lokalna*, „Przegląd Polityczny” 1995, no 29, p. 56.

¹³ In 1994, every thirteenth person believed that (s)he had an influence on matters concerning the whole country, while every sixth person believed (s)he could influence the matters of local community (R. Cichocki, *Świadomość reformy ustrojowej mieszkańców gmin* [in:] *Samorząd terytorialny...*, p. 72).

COMMUNITARIAN DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL INTERESTS

I have already said that the sense of common interest is crucial for the existence of the local community. Still, this statement is not based on the presumption that the local community has all interests in common. In reality the local self-government is the scene of encountering demands of different social groups. The most visible are the economic interests of the enterprises rendering services to the local population, managed by the community itself. Feeling responsible for rendering local services, local governments subsidize the unprofitable activities of communal enterprises. They protect their economic interests as their owners and employers of many workers who, at the same time, are the members of communities. The persuasion of the communal enterprises is strong enough to accomplish their particular interests against the interests of the whole community, which demands both efficiency and low prices. In this case, communal enterprises act as the interest groups towards local public administration using so-called *clientela relations* (explained below) or, if this way of affecting local government does not work, they refer to extreme forms of pressure (strikes).

We could define community as the corporation of the interest groups provided that they are properly represented. Although there are institutional representatives of local interests (as enterprises and trade chambers, real-estate owners' associations, organizations of retired people, unions of tax-payers), they either reveal low activity or do not act as public actors – they are not quite visible for the local community. The most active are the groups of urban residents. They are usually organised in non-formal interest groups according to the area where they live, irrespective of all other social divisions (economic, cultural, political). This situation is an outcome of the poor organisation of political parties and social organisations, as well as mistrust towards the formal institutions. Obviously, inhabitants organise themselves to find solutions of the problems connected with the place of their living.

On the other hand we have to admit that, when it comes to the crucial issue for local social needs, i.e. to the expenses from the local budget, the decisive voice belongs to the communal government. An interesting thing is that in the hierarchy of the most active subjects in exertion of own preferences concerning the expenses from the local budget, barely the sixth place is taken by the subject, which does not belong to the local set of power, i.e. the groups of residents.¹⁴

¹⁴ *Władza i społeczności lokalne w procesie przeobrażeń ustrojowych*, ed. P. Dobrowolski, Katowice 1994, p. 81.

The lack of visible representation of the interest groups is the reason why they are perceived as coteries, accomplishing their interests through informal ties with public officials. Sometimes we meet the pluralism of interest groups (the same interests are represented by many groups), which acts against these groups and these interests. In this case we observe the phenomenon of *clientela relations*, where authorities choose one interest group among many. It is followed by the weakening position of all interest groups, their inability to influence the process of decision-making.¹⁵ Rarely the representatives of interest groups try to refer their interests to the interests of other groups or the whole community. This is the reason of the negative perception of the interest groups as such.

Does it mean that the group's interests – except the interests of residents – are not represented on local level at all? Why of course, they are frequently represented by political parties, which at least try to take a role of an institutional mediator of group interests. Even more often, political parties engage themselves in *parantela relations* – informal and individual cooperation between party members (represented in parliament or community council) and individuals representing own interests of the particular group. The parantela relations take a form of negotiations resulting in fulfilling the interests of both sides.¹⁶

The local level of policy-making gives a great chance to party members, who – using informal bonds – take profitable posts in business. It also gives profit to party leaders, who constantly gather financial and moral support for the coming elections. The local community gives also a chance to party itself to "translate" its political language (i.e. political platform) into a real life (i.e. activities undertaken in the interest of defined social groups). Local political parties, if deeply rooted in the community (which at present occurs very seldom), may create a stable electoral clientele, which also stabilize the democratic system on all levels of policy-making.¹⁷

Still, political parties bring the element of political fight to the public life, which is especially destructive on the local level, as frequently it

¹⁵ G. B. Peters, *Polityka i biurokracja państwowa*, [in:] *Władza i społeczeństwo*, ed. J. Szczupaczyński, Warszawa 1995, pp. 159-160.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁷ Such a stable political clientele is in disposal of the Association of Democratic Left and the Polish Peasant's Party due to the high organisation of both political parties (inherited after their predecessors, i.e. parties governing Poland before 1989) and social reluctance to bear the costs of economic transformation.

makes unable the creation of local government or negotiation of the local budget. On the other hand we cannot blame political parties that they try to manage the social vacuum which exists on local level – this is their role and duty in democratic system.

However, analysing the role of political parties on the local level, we must not overestimate their role. The low number of local leaders revealing their political affiliations is symptomatic for the changes going on in local politics. The majority of them are *reputations leaders*¹⁸ coming from the outside of the local power structure. Probably we face the process of forming the stable social group of local civil servants.¹⁹

We also need to stress the overactivity of administration in the local political process. The domination of local government limits other forms and channels of articulation of social interests. This situation bothers, if we keep in mind the process of forming the civil society.

COMMUNITARIAN DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL CONFLICTS

Decentralization of the state means the decentralization of the huge interest groups which used to operate on the central level, directing their claims to the central government (trade unions, associations of employers etc.). Economic transformation – the emergence of the communal property and communal services – forces these interest groups to search for their point of reference on the local level. This is the reason why the decentralization of decision-making should be strongly supported by the central authorities as it takes off them the burden of negotiation in the large part of social conflicts. This reform creates the situation, where the claims are addressed to agendas of local public administration, not to the whole state. This situation would give the larger possibilities of resolving social conflicts, where the state is an ultimate mediator. Meanwhile, neither the central government accepts its deprivation of certain prerogatives, nor the large interest groups perceive the local authority as a partner for negotiations. We must also admit that the local self-government is not ready to perform the role of mediator between opposite interests. Here the basic problem of local authorities is the inability of resolving conflicts – no proper negotiation procedures nor adequate sources to fulfil social demands in a conflict situation if necessary. On

¹⁸ Their leadership is formed on the public support.

¹⁹ *Władza i społeczność...*, p. 102.

the other hand, interests are poorly expressed or screened and the conflict goes around substitute problems, as personal issues. Again, this is a simple outcome of the absence of institutionalized and open lobbies.²⁰

The attitude of central authorities towards local self-governments is determined by two reasons: the reason of central public administration, which would – with good grace – give up many troubles it cannot cope with and the reason of bureaucrats and politicians who are evidently not ready yet to reform their public role – from the role of public disposers to the role of public servants. The interests of localities do not sound loudly enough on the central level of decision-making. It is partly due to the lack of the institution representing communities set in the structure of the state organs. Although there are some organisations aiding the communal works (Krajowy Sejmik Samorządowy, Związek Miast Polskich, Unia Metropolii Polskich, Unia Miasteczek Polskich, Związek Gmin Wiejskich RP), they are rather part of local than central structures, having neither legal nor political power. There was a whole spectrum of propositions, how to "insert" local interests in the structure of central authorities (the farthest proposition concerned the establishment of the communal parliamentary chamber). This problem will not be solved till the reform of territorial administration is enacted.

The recent politically unfriendly aura towards the reforms of local administration damaged one of its most important aspects. The idea of the local reform had its symbolic meaning – giving power back to the people, who, at the same time, were provided with legal and material means of exercising their power, which, in turn, had its very practical meaning. The new legal and economic conditions allowed local governments to establish new order in the provincial Poland. This order have already gone through the test of economic efficiency. When and if it gets the shape of communitarian democracy, hopefully it will also go through the test of social efficiency.

STRESZCZENIE

Malejące zaufanie do władz centralnych rosnące zaś – do władz lokalnych, jest podstawą kształtowania się demokracji wspólnotowej i uczestniczącej w państwach o ustabilizowanych systemach demokratycznych. Źródła historyczne demokracji wspólnotowej tkwią w tradycji ateńskiej i północnoamerykańskiej, źródła teoretyczne zaś –

²⁰ B. Jałowicki, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

w koncepcjach politycznych Alexisa de Tocquevilla, rozwijanych współcześnie przez Roberta D. Putnama. Elementami konstytutywnymi demokracji wspólnotowej są: debaty publiczne, stowarzyszenia obywatelskie i celowe grupy nacisku. Podstawą kreowania wspólnoty lokalnej jest wspólnie zamieszkiwane terytorium oraz poczucie wspólnoty interesów jego mieszkańców.

W Polsce stopień identyfikowania się ze wspólnotą lokalną jest różny – zależny od regionu kraju. W okresie powojennym obserwujemy regres wspólnot lokalnych spowodowany migracjami ludności oraz wypieraniem czynnika lokalnego przez czynnik ogólnopolski. Ustanowienie samorządów lokalnych buduje na nowo lokalne więzi.

Wspólnoty lokalne są sceną ścierających się interesów społecznych. Kontakty między grupami interesu a administracją lokalną przyjmują postać klientelizmu lub/i parantelizmu. W sytuacji dalszej decentralizacji prerogatyw władzy, samorządy lokalne staną w obliczu konieczności rozwiązywania konfliktów społecznych, które również podlegają decentralizacji.