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Prepared for the SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus?
In Search of the Determinants of the Reaction to the First Wave
of the COVID-19 Pandemic
– the Case of Warsaw and Stockholm

Abstract: The article deals with the activity of municipal self-government administration during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the article is to answer the question about the factors determining the reaction to the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic which was experienced by the municipal self-government administration of the two European cities: Warsaw (“hard” reaction) and Stockholm (“soft” reaction). Due to the hypothesis that the predictive and responsive potential of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm differentiates their reaction to the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided to use several research methods: comparative analysis, analysis of legal acts, analysis of statistical data and elements of system analysis. The conducted research proves that it is difficult to indicate the relationship between the predictive and responsive potential of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm and its reaction to the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sources of the difference in this reaction should therefore be sought in other factors.

Key words: municipal self-government administration, COVID-19 pandemic, Warsaw, Stockholm

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, treated as an unprecedented political, social and economic crisis, had a significant impact on the functioning of the state and its institutions. As Graham Smith, Tim Hughes, Lizzie Adams and Charlotte Obijiaku argue, the pandemic forced the state to implement a number of above-standard measures aimed at limiting the destructive consequences of the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (2021). They had a different nature, often to an extreme extent, ranging from the activities aimed at protecting the life and health of citizens, and ending with activities aimed at “protection” of individual sectors of the economy, or maintaining the current standard of public services. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic also manifested itself at the local government level, including cities. Michael Kimmelman believes that it was the cities that experienced the pandemic crisis in a special way (2020, cf. Sienkiewicz, Kuć-Czajkowska, 2022). The reason for this situation can be connected to the number of inhabitants and, related to it, the intensity of social interactions, treated as a factor contributing to the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus and, consequently, seriously hindering the “fight” with the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. Boin, ‘t Hart, Stern, Sundelius, 2017).

Literature review – cities’ in terms to the COVID-19 pandemic

Scientific reflection on the “fight” with the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in cities involves at least three research threads.

The first and, which should be noted, relatively quickly developed direction of considerations is determined by the relationship between environmental factors and the dynamics of the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, and, consequently, the number of cases. The analyzed variables include: location of a local government unit, its characteristic climate, population potential, and finally employee mobility. Numerous analyzes, primarily case studies, prove that the relationship between the aforementioned variables and the development of the COVID-19 pandemic is generally positive (see Ai et al., 2020; Carteni, Di Francesco, Martino, 2020; Coccia, 2020; Connolly, Ali, Keil, 2020; Krzysztofik, Kantor-Pietraga, Spórna, 2020).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of cities is the second trend that emerges from the extensive literature on the subject. In this case, it is about capturing the destructive consequences of the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus for individual sector (problem) areas. It turns out, as the researchers argue, that the scope of this influence is very wide. It covers the areas such as health, spatial planning, public transport, etc. (see Bucsky, 2020; Sharifia, Khavarian-Garmsird, 2020; de Haas, Faber, Hamersma, 2020; Honey-Rosés et al., 2021).

The representatives of the third direction of research focus on the “responses” of public administration, including municipal self-government administration, to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their attention is therefore focused on the potential to “fight” the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. The reflection dedicated to post-pandemic recovery and renewal also plays an important role. In this case, it is about a return to the state from before spring 2020. The analysis of the literature proves that the catalog of measures of the recovery and renewal is diverse. The authors draw attention to such elements as achieving a certain level of budget revenues, ensuring a certain standard of public service provision, or finally the implementation of the decision-making model known before the COVID-19 pandemic in which interested social and private actors participate actively (see Batty, 2020; Kunzmann, 2020; James, Das, Jalosinska, Smith, 2020). This is the direction of reflection that is also represented by the author of this article.

Obviously, the directions outlined above do not exhaust all the research threads. The unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis means that the number of topics discussed is huge and corresponds, on the one hand, to the multitude of problems posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and, on the other hand, to the theoretical and methodological diversity of research approaches represented by the authors of numerous publications.

Research scope, aim and methods

The article deals with the activity of municipal self-government administration during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author is interested in the so-called first wave

of the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. the period at the end of winter and spring 2020.¹ It is worth noting that this is a period in which the entire state apparatus, including municipal self-government administration, faced a challenge – namely the spread of the SARS-CoV coronavirus – which “tested” the efficiency and effectiveness of its functioning on an unprecedented scale.² Bearing in mind the above, one may be tempted to say that the analysis of the activity falling at the end of winter and spring 2020 is of particular importance. It provokes the reflection on the predictive and responsive potential of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm.

Assuming that potential is a resource of possibilities and abilities, one may attempt to define a predictive and responsive potential (cf. Ansell, Boin, Keller, 2010).

In the first case (predictive potential), it is necessary to emphasize the ability to program phenomena and processes that may somehow affect the functioning of the local government community. It is therefore also the programming, in the medium or long term, of the activities that would respond to these phenomena and processes. In the second case (responsive potential), the key role is played by the ability to conduct (implement) pre-programmed actions. It is worth paying attention to the fact that the implemented activities are to counteract the destructive consequences of materializing phenomena and processes.

In the analyzed case – namely the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic – the predictive and responsive potential of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm is manifested in two ways.

On the one hand, it is about the activities carried out at the strategic level, i.e. the preparation of relevant documents (urban strategies, plans, programs, etc.) which define the framework of activities performed in the medium or long term. On the other hand, attention is drawn to the functioning of municipal self-government administration bodies and their subordinate bureaucracy. It is a function of the solutions adopted at the level of the office structure, the division of competences and tasks between its individual organizational units and city organizational units (cf. Boin, Bynander, 2015).

It should be noted that the presented analytical approach is an approach that the literature on the subject calls for a normative approach (Pietrzyk-Reeves, 2017). In other words, the author’s attention is focused on the legal and institutional order that determines the activity of the municipal self-government administration in Warsaw and Stockholm.

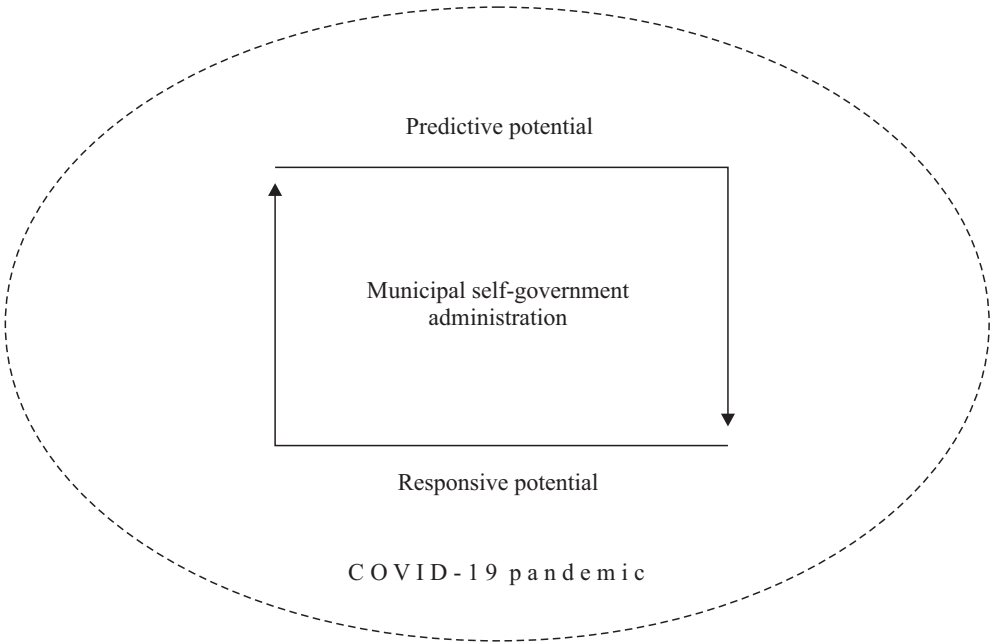
The comparison of the capital of Poland and Sweden is not accidental. Among the elements that provoke reflection dedicated to these two cities, the following should be mentioned:

1. High level of local autonomy of local self-government in Poland and Sweden. This is evidenced by the results of the research on the position of local self-government

¹ The period of the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is conventional. It is worth noting that the beginning and end of each wave is determined each time by the government of a given country, which the author of the article has already pointed out in earlier publications (see Glinka, 2020a, p. 115; Glinka, 2021, p. 48).

² The author of this article has already analyzed the impact of the so-called the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of local government units, both large and small Polish cities (see Glinka, 2020a, 2021).

Graph 1. The predictive potential and responsive potential of the municipal self-government administration in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic



Source: Author’s own work.

in the spatial and administrative system of the state conducted by, inter alia, Andreas Ladner and research team members (2019). As emphasized by the authors of the work “Patterns of Local Autonomy in Europe. Governance and Public Management”, both Poland and Sweden are in the group of the countries where the level of local autonomy is objectively the highest (cf. Ladner, Keuffer, Baldersheim, 2016; Swianiewicz, 2019). Bearing in mind the above, it is tempting to say that this situation “opens the way” to the relatively unhindered activity of municipal self-government administration bodies and the bureaucrats subordinate to them, also in the period of the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. The clearly dominant demographic potential of Warsaw and Stockholm (Population, 2022). Both cities, as capitals of states, faced not only a considerable “size”, but also a high dynamics of social contacts in the period of the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The reaction of the municipal administration of Warsaw and Stockholm to the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic thus appears to be significant as it illustrates a commitment to “fighting” the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, different from that of small towns or rural centers.
3. A different response to the threat related to the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus presented by the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm. In the first case (Warsaw), this reaction is decisive. There are the changes in the mode of operation of the municipal office and limitation of the scope of public services provided (the so-called hard reaction). In the second case (Stockholm), the

reaction does not bring about such changes. Its essence, however, can be seen in the recommendations addressed to the stakeholders of the office (the so-called soft reaction).

The aim of the article is to answer the question about the factors determining the reaction to the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic which was experienced by the municipal self-government administration of the two European cities: Warsaw (“hard” reaction) and Stockholm (“soft” reaction). Due to the hypothesis that the predictive and responsive potential differentiates the reaction of the municipal administration of Warsaw and Stockholm to the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided to use several research methods.

First, the content of legal acts and documents held by the offices of the cities in question was analyzed. The obtained results were then compared basing on the categorization key corresponding to the two already mentioned dimensions of the activity of municipal self-government administration – the strategic dimension and the operational dimension (cf. Stephan, 2001; Landam, 2003). The analysis of statistical data, mainly the data of the Central Statistical Office (Pol. *Główny Urząd Statystyczny*, GUS) and Statistic Sweden (Swe. *Statistikmyndigheten*, SCB), played also a role that was difficult to ignore. The broad context of the considerations determined the use of elements of systemic analysis which allows treating the products of the political system as the products of the influence of its environment (in the analyzed case these are the local political systems of Warsaw and Stockholm) (cf. Krone, 1980).

The hypothesis is accompanied by the following research questions:

1. How is the predictive and responsive potential of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm manifested? Is it a strategic and operational activity in the both cases?
2. Is the predictive and responsive potential of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm focused on the threat of the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, and if so, to what extent?

The differences in the predictive and responsive potential of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm will argue for a positive verification of the hypothesis. It is therefore assumed that the so-called soft response (Stockholm) is related to the strategic and operational activity of the municipal self-government administration, while the so-called hard reaction (Warsaw) is associated with its limitations or deficits.

Analysis

Predictive potential

Both cities in question successfully implement the idea of strategic management, which as emphasized by Richard Walker and Rhys Andrew, is of key importance for the functioning of the local self-government units with a significant development potential (2015). This is evidenced by an extensive catalog of strategic documents that define the

framework for the activity of municipal self-government administration, both in Warsaw and Stockholm (see Table 1).

Tabela 1

Strategic dimension of the activity of municipal self-government administration in Warsaw and Stockholm – an attempt to compare

| City | | Warsaw | Stockholm |
|--|---------|--|---|
| Document type | | | |
| General | | + | + |
| | | (Pol. <i>Strategia #Warszawa2030</i>) | (Swe. <i>Vision 2040 – Möjligheter-nas Stockholm</i>) |
| Sectoral (problematic) by areas of urban policy: | | | |
| 1. population | | + | + |
| 2. public services | | + | + |
| 3. economy | | + | + |
| 4. housing | | + | + |
| 5. public spaces and green areas | | + | + |
| 6. social inclusion | | + | + |
| 7. spatial management | | + | + |
| 8. quality of life | | + | + |
| 9. transport | | + | + |
| Crisis management oriented | Level 1 | + | + |
| | | Crisis Management Plan (Pol. <i>Plan Zarządzania Kryzysowego</i>) | Stockholm City Security Program (Swe. <i>Stockholms stads säkerhetsprogram</i>) |
| | Level 2 | + | + |
| | | A guide to dealing with emergency situations, September 2018 (Pol. <i>Poradnik postępowania w sytuacjach zagrożeń</i>) | Crisis Management Manual, February 2020 (Swe. <i>Krisledningshandbok</i>) |

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on: Warszawa, 2022; Stockholms stad, 2020, 2022d, Poradnik, 2018; *Krisledningshandbok*, 2020. The plus (+) denotes the fact of having (developing, adopting and implementing) a specific strategic document.

In addition to general documents, i.e. those that define the key assumptions of the development policy, cities implement the assumptions of sectoral documents focused on individual areas of urban policy.³ Regardless of the analyzed case, the spectrum of areas whose functioning is reflected in the documents is very wide. As can be seen from the data presented in Table 1, the above-mentioned documents program the activity of municipal self-government administration in all the areas of urban policy listed by UN Habitat. These are areas such as: population, public services, economy, housing, public spaces and green areas, social inclusion, spatial management, quality of life, transport (UN Habitat, 2022).

The preparation, adoption and implementation of a document relating to crisis management is an element that plays a significant role in the development of the predictive potential of the municipal self-government administration in Warsaw and Stockholm.

³ The urban policy area is defined as the sector that is the subject of activity of local actors (municipal administration, social entities and private entities) aimed at meeting the collective needs of the local government community (see earlier publications of the author: Glinka, 2020b, 2020c, p. 19).

In both cases such a document exists, which results from the provisions of generally applicable law, both in Poland and in Sweden.⁴ Importantly, such a document is supplemented, in both cases, by a compact study dedicated to emergency procedures, namely the “Guide to dealing with emergencies” – Pol. *Poradnik postępowania w sytuacjach zagrożenia* (Poradnik, 2018) and the “Crisis management manual” – Swe. *Krisledningshandbok* (*Krisledningshandbok*, 2020).

When analyzing the above list, it should be noted that the differences between Warsaw and Stockholm do not concern the mere fact of having strategic documents (or the lack of them) at each of the three working levels – general, sectoral and crisis management-oriented. The differences are revealed by a cursory analysis of the assumptions of these documents, although, it should be emphasized, they are, in a sense, a “natural” consequence of the work carried out in different, after all, political and legal conditions, but also economic and socio-cultural ones. For this reason, they only form a general context of considerations and are not of interest to the author.

It is worth noting, however, that the documents focused on the issues of public management in force in the first months of 2020 (i.e. at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak) do not focus on the actions that should be taken in conditions of such an unprecedented threat, such as the spread of coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. This does not mean, obviously, that the issues of dealing with an epidemiological threat are completely ignored in them.

On the contrary, the analysis of the aforementioned guides/manuals proves that the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm recognizes the importance of the threats related to the spread of zoonotic diseases and influenza. Nevertheless, the attention of their authors focuses on other threats. Namely, a wide catalog of natural hazards (such as wind, storm, hail, snowstorm, frost, flood, flooding, heat, smog), local hazards (in the form of fire, misfires, unexploded ordnance, electric shock) and hazards that can be defined technological (e.g. construction disaster, energy failure, chemical failure, radiation failure).

The reasons for such an “underestimation” of the epidemiological threat should be seen in the experience of the crisis situations that took place in Poland and Sweden in the last several dozen years. It is worth mentioning, for example, the flood of 1997 which resulted in flooding in Poland, including Warsaw in the area of Wał Miedzeszyński, the terrorist attack in Stockholm of April 2017 (Arnberg, 2017), or fires that covered the area of southern and northern Sweden from May to July 2018 (Asp et al., 2019). The lack of proper preparation is confirmed in the excerpts from the special report which stated: “[...] the staff structure and working methods described in the crisis management manual [...] were not adapted to the conditions prevailing during the COVID-19” (FHS, 2020, p. 19).

Responsive potential

Per analogy to the strategic dimension, the activity of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm is carried out in many areas of urban policy.

⁴ The obligation to prepare such a document is imposed on local government bodies by both Polish and Swedish legislators (Lag, 2006; Rozporządzenie, 2006; Ustawa, 2007)

As evidenced by the data presented in Table 2, this activity is based on an extensive structure of offices which implements the postulate of sectoral (problematic) distribution of competences and tasks.

The functioning of such units that take action in the area of crisis management is also a result of the aforementioned distribution. On the eve of the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are: the Security and Crisis Management Office (Pol. *Biuro Bezpieczeństwa i Zarządzania Kryzysowego*) in Warsaw (Zarządzenie 2007; 2020b) and the Quality and Safety Department, (Swe. *Avdelningen för kvalitet och säkerhet*) in Stockholm (Stockholms stad, 2022a). Importantly, teams are the structures responsible for coordinating activities carried out in the conditions of the threat of spreading the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. The decision on their appointment is made by an authorized body. In Warsaw, it is the city president (Zarządzenie, 2019; 2020a), while in Stockholm – the city executive board (Stockholms stad, 2022a). The analysis of the data presented in Table 2 shows that the Crisis Management Team (Pol. *Zespół Zarządzania Kryzysowego*) in Warsaw and the Crisis Management Committee (Swe. *Krisledningsnämnden*) in Stockholm) are the above-mentioned teams.

Table 2

The operational dimension of the activity of municipal self-government administration in Warsaw and Stockholm – an attempt to compare

| City | | Warsaw | Stockholm |
|--|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Structure | | | |
| Managerial | | president | city executive board |
| | | + | + |
| Sector (problematic) by areas of urban policy: | | | |
| | 1. population | + | + |
| | 2. public services | + | + |
| | 3. economy | + | + |
| | 4. housing | + | + |
| | 5. public spaces and green areas | + | + |
| | 6. social inclusion | + | + |
| | 7. spatial management | + | + |
| | 8. quality of life | + | + |
| | 9. transport | + | + |
| Crisis management oriented | Level 1 | + | + |
| | | Security and Crisis Management Office (Pol. <i>Biuro Bezpieczeństwa i Zarządzania Kryzysowego</i>) | Quality and Safety Department (Swe. <i>Avdelningen för kvalitet och säkerhet</i>) |
| | Level 2 | + | + |
| | | Crisis Management Team (Pol. <i>Zespół Zarządzania Kryzysowego</i>) | Crisis Management Committee (Swe. <i>Krisledningsnämnden</i>) |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on: Zarządzenie, 2007, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Sttocolms stad, 2020, 2022a. The functioning of a specific organizational structure was marked with the plus (+).

Analyzing the activity of the municipal administration of Warsaw and Stockholm falling in the period of the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems

worth to pay attention to one more significant element. It is not directly related to the predictive or responsive potential. It should be noted, however, that it can act as a predictor of, what the literature on the subject calls, “organizational learning of administration” (see March, 1991; Huber, 1991; Slater, Narver, 1995; Alavi, Leidner, 2001; Olejniczak, 2014), and thus influence the process of shaping these potentials.

It turns out that the experience of the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic may trigger some kind of intra-organizational reflection. As evidenced by the example of Stockholm, its manifestation can be seen in the decision to conduct an in-depth and multifactorial evaluation of a dedicated activity conducted in six key directions. They are: crisis management (activity of the municipal self-government administration), entrepreneurs, seniors, leadership in the city government, the most sensitive areas of the city, children and youth. The evaluation is an attempt to answer the question about the predictive and responsive potential of Stockholm’s municipal self-government in the period of the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, it has a two-fold character. On the one hand, the actions taken within the organization itself (internal evaluation) should be emphasized. The activities of this type are carried out by the city council (Stockholms stad, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2022b, 2022c). On the other hand, attention is drawn to the work of entities that not only have appropriate knowledge and competences, but are independent of the municipal self-government administration. In this case, one talks about scientists and experts who prepare a number of thematic reports (FHS, 2020; Governo, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f; Stockholms stad, 2022b).

The second city in question – Warsaw – although equally strongly affected by the destructive consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, does not make an evaluation effort similar to the one taking place in Stockholm. This does not mean that the evaluation of the activity falling within the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is not happening at all. The report on the functioning of the city in 2020 emphasizes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the individual areas of urban policy. It also lists the activities aimed at minimizing the destructive consequences of the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. However, this evaluation is internal. In other words, the report was prepared by the employees of the Strategy and Analysis Office (Pol. *Biuro Strategii i Analiz*) which functions within the structure of the city hall (Raport, 2021).

Conclusions

As the analysis shows, the activity of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm focused on the issues of crisis management is not only strategic, but also operational. The compilation and comparison, firstly, of official documents (strategies, plans, programs, etc.) held by the surveyed offices, and secondly, the division of tasks between their organizational structures does not reveal any differences in terms of the predictive and responsive potential of the administration of both cities in question. Considering the above, it is impossible to confirm the formulated hypothesis.

A negative verification of the previously adopted assumptions opens the field for further in-depth research on the determinants of the reaction of the municipal self-gov-

ernment administration of Warsaw and Stockholm to the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth pointing to at least two possible directions of considerations here.

The first and, as it seems, the main direction of research is related to the activities of the government administration, i.e. the activities of the Polish and Swedish governments. Even a cursory analysis of the extensive literature on the subject, reports prepared by specialized institutions and media reports proves that these activities were extremely different. While in Poland it was decided to introduce a number of far-reaching legal solutions that “froze” social contacts and made the functioning of many sectors of the economy more difficult, in Sweden the government’s reaction to the threat related to the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was incomparably more restrained. The attitude to the nationwide lockdown which was firmly applied in Poland and which was not introduced in Sweden was a manifestation of these differences.

A function of changing the research perspective is the second potential research direction on the reaction of the municipal self-government administration of Warsaw and Stockholm to the so-called first wave of the pandemic. It should be emphasized once again that the conducted analysis is of a normative nature. Therefore, it takes into account the formal (official) “products” of the local political system functioning in the form of documents (strategies, programs, plans etc.) and organizational solutions (structures). Nevertheless, a normative approach can create an “introduction” to research on the decisions about how to react to the so-called first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. An important role could therefore be played by the reflection dedicated to the personality determinants of the activity of municipal authorities and office workers. In this case, it is about research drawing on the achievements of psychology and congenital studies.

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Przygotowane na koronawirusa SARS-CoV-2? W poszukiwaniu uwarunkowań reakcji na pierwszą falę pandemii COVID-19 – przypadek Warszawy i Sztokholmu

Streszczenie

Artykuł porusza problematykę aktywności miejskiej administracji samorządowej w okresie pandemii COVID-19. Celem artykułu jest udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytanie o czynniki determinujące reakcję na tzw. pierwszą falę pandemii COVID-19, jaka była udziałem administracji samorządowej dwóch europejskich miast: Warszawy (reakcja „twarda”) oraz Sztokholmu (reakcja „miękka”). W związku z hipotezą, że predyktywny i responsywny potencjał miejskiej administracji samorządowej Warszawy i Sztokholmu różnicuje ich reakcję na tzw. pierwszą falę pandemii COVID-19, zdecydowano o wykorzystaniu kilku metod badawczych: analizy porównawczej, analizy aktów prawnych, analizy danych statystycznych oraz elementów analizy systemowej. Przeprowadzone badanie udowadnia, że trudno wskazać na zależność pomiędzy potencjałem predyktywnym i responsywnym miejskiej administracji samorządowej Warszawy i Sztokholmu a jej reakcją na tzw. pierwszą falę pandemii COVID-19. Źródeł odmienności owej reakcji należy zatem poszukiwać w innych czynnikach.

Słowa kluczowe: miejska administracja samorządowa, pandemia COVID-19, Warszawa, Sztokholm

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