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Forms of Public Participation in the Polish Local Government

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to present forms of involving citizens, their groups, and organisations in the sphere of local administration activity and to answer the question whether a participatory model of public management is present in the Polish local government. The article presents the evolution of relationship between public administration and citizens, and forms of citizen involvement in decision-making, provision of public services, and governance enabling citizens to have a real impact on public affairs. Results of the analysis indicate that Poland has a formal-institutional base for public participation, but the social reality does not support a thesis that a participatory model of local governance is actually used. The article employs an institutional and legal approach and an analysis of the literature.

Key words: public participation, local self-government, Poland

Introduction

Public participation is nowadays an inherent element of public policies. It can be defined as the participation of citizens in the creation and implementation of public policies, as well as participation in decision-making and in the implementation of public tasks. Participatory public management is postulated as a response to various dysfunctions of contemporary democracy, including the poor quality of decision-making processes, low level of participation, decreasing legitimacy of those in power, decline of trust to public institutions, and the ignorance of citizens. Another reason for the creation of various forms of public participation is to move away from a traditional hierarchical style of government towards governance and the resulting need for insight into specific social problems. The widest dimension of public participation can be found in local government, especially in municipalities. Thanks to participation, public governance is no longer reserved to the exclu-

sive competence of the public administration, but it is also open to citizens.

The aim of this study is to present selected forms of involving citizens, their groups and organisations in the activity of local government and to try to answer the question whether a participatory model of public management is present in the Polish local government. The hypothesis assumes that in Poland there are formal-institutional bases for public participation, but the social reality does not provide grounds for a real participatory model of local government management. The research objectives determine the structure of the article. Firstly, the evolution of relations between public administration and citizens is presented. Subsequently, the article discusses forms of: 1) involving stakeholders in the decision-making process; 2) involving citizens in the provision of public services; and 3) public participation in governance that enable citizens to have a real impact on public affairs. In this process both parties (administration and citizens) should work together in partnership. The conclusion makes reference to the hypothesis. The article employs an institutional-legal approach and the analysis of literature. The analysis covers legal acts, documents, reports and literature¹.

1. Relations between public administration and citizens – from a petitioner to a stakeholder

In recent decades, as public administration has been evolving, the role of citizens and the relationship between them and officials have been changing. Traditional Weberian public administration was neither sensitive to citizens' needs nor oriented towards interaction with them. Needs were defined by politicians and officials and were taken into account as long as they were reflected in legal provisions. In this model, the administration authoritatively decided about rights and duties of its petitioners. With time, this model started to be criticised, pointing to, among other things, bureaucracy and rigid rules as detached from human needs it should satisfy.

In contrast to the ossified traditional model of public administration, the concept of new public management (NPM) began to emerge transfer-

¹ This article is a revised, English-language version of a chapter entitled *Administracja i społeczeństwo*, written by the author and submitted for publication.

ring methods from the private sector to the administration. As its assumptions spread, the citizen-petitioner gradually began to be perceived as a client seeking public services. At the same time, citizens' expectations grew. They demanded that the administration take their views and interests into account when developing and implementing public policies. In many countries, local authorities adopted civic engagement methods and techniques that allowed them to better understand citizens' needs. These included complaint and application forms, consumer charters, public service user satisfaction surveys and others. Authorities saw the emergence of new service standards and citizens became customers. As Katarzyna Radzik-Maruszak points out, the new public management preferred such methods of involving citizens that "while bringing maximum information to local authorities, still left the most important decisions in their hands" (Radzik-Maruszak, 2020, p. 32).

Another transformation of the relationship between authorities and citizens took place with the spread of the governance paradigm. Governance requires broadening the scope and mechanisms of participation and involvement of civic society in creating and implementing public policies, improving communication, and increasing the centrality of citizens in relations with public administration. Citizens started to be perceived as stakeholders, i.e. entities (individual, social groups, local communities) that are both affected by decisions taken by the public administration and can have an impact on them thanks to existing participation mechanisms. By participating in solving problems that concern them, citizens become co-decision makers and co-creators of the common welfare. Consequently, new methods and tools of citizen participation were introduced into the administration to enable citizens to have a real impact on public affairs or treat them as experts in the decision-making process (Radzik-Maruszak, 2020, p. 32). Public administration thus opened the way to civic participation in public management. At the same time, this guaranteed the right to public information, which is particularly important for participation in public management.

2. Forms of stakeholder involvement in the decision-making process

Over the last three decades, legal bases for citizen participation in the decision-making process have been introduced into Polish legislation. This part of the article discusses successively: local referendum, social

consultations, social councils and commissions, civic resolution initiative, citizens' panels and citizens' juries.

A local referendum is a form of direct democracy that enables citizens to participate in making binding decisions. In accordance with the Act of 15 September 2000 on local referendum (*Ustawa z dnia 15 września 2000 r. o referendum lokalnym*), the entity entitled to submit a referendum initiative is the constituting body and citizens. The validity of a referendum depends on the turnout. Practice shows that in Poland the institution of local referendum has limited application. Only some of referendums have been considered valid. In the 2014–2018 local government term, only 26 thematic referendums were held across the country, half of which were valid. At the same time, there were 46 referendums on the recall of local government bodies – all in municipalities. Only 6 referendums were deemed valid. The average turnout in recall referendums was only 16.1% (Zakrzewski, 2020). Both the number of referendums and the turnout indicate a low participation of local communities in decision-making processes in matters concerning them. The institution of the referendum contributes to the empowerment of inhabitants, but it also has serious limitations and cannot be treated as the only form of dialogue between the local administration and inhabitants.

A form of dialogue between representatives of public authorities and the public is public consultation, the aim of which is to gather opinions and, on the basis of these, to make optimal decisions on public matters by the authorities. Consultations also serve to ensure the legitimacy of decisions and to strengthen the public's sense of shared responsibility for public matters. A non-binding character is a feature of all social consultations. In local government units, social consultations have been settled in local government acts. In addition, the legislature has provided for public consultations in the following areas: creation of plans and studies of spatial development conditions and directions, drafting development strategies of local government units, development and implementation of municipal strategies for solving social problems, preparation of action plans for labour market institutions by the poviát (county) government; preparation of environmental protection programmes, when issuing environmental decisions. A special form of obligatory consultations was provided for in the Act of 24 April 2003 on public benefit activity and volunteerism (*Ustawa z dnia 24 kwietnia 2003 r. o działalności pożytku publicznego i o wolontariacie*). Under this law, local government bodies are obliged to consult non-governmental organisations and other entities

conducting public benefit activity on draft normative acts in areas related to the statutory activity of these organisations and the annual programme of cooperation with these entities (Articles 5 and 5a).

In practice, consultations with residents are most often carried out in municipalities, especially in large cities. Very rarely are consultations initiated by residents (Zielińska, Kraszewski, 2019, p. 11). It should be noted that there is a lack of legal provisions that would oblige local authorities to inform residents about the extent to which their opinions are taken into account when making decisions. Research indicates that this is often the most neglected stage of public consultation.

Social councils and commissions are collegiate bodies representing citizens and their interests in decision-making processes, appointed by local authorities to give opinions. Despite their legal basis, they have no formal decision-making powers. Below is a brief description of three selected community councils functioning in Polish local governments, i.e. youth councils, councils for senior citizens, and public benefit councils.

Youth councils emerged as early as in the 1990s, but most of them were established in the first decade of the 21st century as a result of the 2001 amendment to the Act on Municipal Self-Government. In 2021, there were over 500 youth councils in Poland, which is less than one fifth of all local government councils in Poland. Until recently, the legal basis for their creation existed only at the level of municipal self-government. The Local Government Acts were amended in 2021, which significantly strengthened the position of youth councils and enabled them to be active at every local government level. The aim of these bodies is to shape civic competences in young people and to increase their interest and involvement in public life. Representatives of youth councils at all levels are part of the Council for Dialogue with the Young Generation established in 2019.

Senior citizens' councils can be established under the 2013 amendment to the Act on Municipal Self-Government, which created legal foundations for the operation of such bodies. In practice, senior citizens' councils were present in the public sphere at least a few years earlier. Their formation, like youth councils, is not obligatory. The council of seniors is established by the municipal council on its own initiative or at the request of interested communities. The law provides for the establishment of senior citizens' councils only at the municipal level. However, legislative work is underway to create a legal basis for county and provincial senior citizens' councils (Senat RP, 2020). At the end of 2019, there were 380

municipal senior citizens' councils in Poland, which is 15.3% of the total number of municipalities in Poland. The literature points to their façade character and ineffectiveness (Wiśniewski, 2017, p. 3).

Public Benefit Activity Councils are established under the 2010 amendment to the Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism. It is a form of dialogue between local government administration and third sector organisations. Rules for the formation of councils at the county and municipal level were changed with the amendment of the Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism of August 2015. Previously, the establishing of this body was optional. Now the local government is obliged to establish the council if requested by NGOs. Public benefit activity councils operate in all provincial governments. There is no data on the current number of these councils in municipalities and counties. In 2013, they existed in 22% of all counties and in only 2% of all municipalities. Research indicates that these councils face a lack of interest in establishing them from both local government units and non-governmental organisations as well as low activity of these councils (Domagała, 2014, pp. 2–3). Their functioning is far from the full implementation of dialogue between administration and citizens. Conclusions and opinions of these councils are very often not taken into account by the executive body of the local government unit (Pasiut, 2018, p. 16).

Apart from the above-mentioned, other social councils and commissions function in local government units, such as: provincial social dialogue councils; provincial and county social councils for the disabled; provincial and county labour market councils, sports councils, safety and order commissions in counties, urban planning and architectural commissions. All social councils and commissions are a forum for cooperation between the local government administration and the public in the decision-making process. Agnieszka Pawłowska has concluded on the basis of research on social councils and commissions in cities with county rights, that social councils and commissions have an opinion-making and advisory role above all, but an important subject of their activity is also initiating local decisions. A conclusive determination of the impact of social councils and commissions on local decision-making has been found to be a difficult issue to investigate (Pawłowska, 2020, p. 162). Members of the surveyed councils and commissions as well as representatives of the local administration emphasised benefits resulting from the functioning of social councils and commissions, i.e. better recognition of local community problems and optimisation of decisions made. These entities

are often underestimated or neglected both in scientific research concerning forms of public involvement and in the practice of local government units (Pawłowska et al., 2020, p. 164). Despite statutory powers, their potential is not used sufficiently. In the literature, one can find opinions based on research that many of social councils do not actually function (Radzik-Maruszak, 2019, p. 261).

The citizen's resolution initiative is another tool for involving stakeholders in the decision-making process. It was introduced into local government laws in 2018. It allows residents to submit draft resolutions to a local government decision-making body. Before the legislator introduced the legislative initiative into the legal order, this instrument had been included in statutes of 19% of municipalities. In practice, however, the tool was rarely used by residents. Moreover, only a small proportion of these initiatives were adopted by municipal councils, which indicates their low effectiveness (Zielińska, Kraszewski, 2019, pp. 5, 20).

The citizen's panel is an innovative deliberative process organised to consult a large (usually several dozen) randomly selected representative group of inhabitants from a given area or users of specific public services. The role of the citizens' panel is to develop recommendations on specific issues through discussion. Citizens' panels are used in many countries around the world. In Poland, they are a novelty. The pioneer is the city of Gdańsk, which in 2014 organised a citizens' panel on improving the civic budget. In subsequent years (2016–2018), three further panels were held in the city. Panels were also organised in Lublin, Warsaw, Łódź and Wrocław. These innovative form of public participation is organised in Poland on the basis of local government acts as a form of public consultation or on the basis of the Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism (Article 5) as a public task. Neither of these forms gives the panel decision-making powers. In practice, panel's recommendations are often ignored by local authorities (Huzarewicz, 2021).

Citizens' juries are specific forms of deliberative participation. A representative group of citizens (usually consisting of several persons) meets to consider specific, usually contentious issues, hear witnesses, and reach a decision. The settlement is not binding for the public authority, but it rather is intended to support decision making. This method was originally developed by the Jefferson Center, a research centre in the United States. It has been used, among others, by local authorities in Great Britain, Germany, and France. In Poland, citizens' juries are forms of deliberative democracy that are very rarely applied. The first citizens' jury was or-

ganised in 2011 in Poznań (it concerned Umultowska Street). However, the procedure used in it was far from methodological assumptions of this method (Krzewińska, 2012, p. 18).

3. Forms of citizen involvement in public service delivery

In the traditional model of public administration, the responsibility for providing public services rests on public institutions. As a result of the influence of new public management and the concept of governance, the role of public administration as a direct provider of public services has been increasingly reduced to the benefit of private and social sectors. Forms of involving citizens and their organisations in the delivery of public services are discussed below in the following order: commissioning (contracting) of public services, public-private partnerships, public service vouchers, local initiative, and co-production of public services.

Commissioning (contracting) of public services can take place in the form of: a) contracting under the Public Procurement Law – all entities can be contractors of the public administration; and b) entrusting or supporting the implementation of public tasks under the Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism – only non-governmental organisations and other not-for-profit organisations can be contractors (Sześciło, 2014a, p. 142). The procedure of contracting is based on competitive mechanisms. A specific example of contracting out public services is the entrusting of the running of local government schools by municipalities and counties to private entities on the basis of the procedure provided for in the Education Law of 14 December 2016 (Ustawa z dnia 14 grudnia 2016 r. *Prawo oświatowe*). According to Article 3 of this Act, the education system can be supported by, among others, non-governmental organisations, legal persons carrying out statutory activities in the field of education and upbringing, employers, economic self-governments, associations, professional bodies, organisational units of the State Fire Service. The above-mentioned entities are organisational and legal forms of a broadly defined civic society which, through its activity, can interact with public administration bodies in the implementation of education (Blicharz, 2020, p. 380).

The public-private partnership (PPP) is a form of private sector involvement in the implementation of public tasks. In Poland, public-private partnerships have been developed since 2009, and the main initiators

of such projects are local government units. From the beginning of 2009 to the end of June 2020, they concluded (directly or through units associated with them) 132 contracts (90% of all). The largest number of contracts that entered the implementation phase were signed by municipalities (99) (Ministerstwo Funduszy i Polityki Regionalnej, 2021). In Poland, local government units increasingly often recognize the need for cooperation with the private sector, but the value of investment carried out under the PPP format, compared to investments in the whole economy, is still marginal. This results from many existing barriers in undertaking initiatives under the PPP format, such as: complicated procedure of preparing a partnership agreement, reluctance of public decision-makers and entrepreneurs to cooperate, distrustful attitude of the society and controlling bodies, and the lack of appropriate personnel and knowledge (Zawora, 2020, pp. 376–377).

Public service vouchers are yet another mechanism for involving citizens in the sphere of public service provision, in which the service provider is chosen by the citizen-customer himself, and the cost of providing the service is covered by public funds. The ability to choose services promotes public empowerment. Vouchers are most common in education (known as education vouchers), health care, labour market services (including training) and care for the elderly (Sześciło, 2014b, p. 157). In Poland, it is not a widely used market mechanism for the provision of public services. Some features of the voucher system are present in education and health care. For example, in health care, a patient enjoys a statutory freedom to choose a healthcare provider from those contracted by the National Health Fund.

The local initiative is a form of direct participation of citizens in the implementation of local government tasks. It is regulated in the Act of 2003 on public benefit activity and volunteerism. The local initiative consists in the implementation of specific public tasks at the request of a group of inhabitants in a local government unit (usually municipality) and with their participation. Citizens' participation (as applicants) may take the form of community work, financial or material contributions. The essence of the local initiative is that residents not only propose an idea for a specific project, but also participate in its implementation and are responsible for their commitments. It is worth mentioning that the obligation to adopt a local initiative resolution has existed since 2010, but between 2014 and 2017, only 23% of municipalities adopted such resolutions, which demonstrates the low interest of local governments in this initiative (Zielińska, Kraszewski, 2019, p. 5).

The findings of the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) show that the local initiative is not a widely known and used tool to stimulate residents' activity, especially in small municipalities. Of the 384 municipalities surveyed by the NIK (online survey), as many as 89% did not use this form of cooperation with residents (in 2015–2017). Out of the twenty municipalities audited, only two had separate organisational units responsible for matters related to the local initiative, and direct contact with residents and non-governmental organisations. This shows that municipalities do not attach much importance to activating residents in this way. Definitely more popular than the local initiative are forms of participation in which the participation of residents is limited to submitting an idea, i.e. the village fund and the civic budget. According to municipalities implementing the local initiative, the largest difficulties associated with this form of citizen involvement were low interest among residents and insufficient funds in the municipal budget (NIK, 2018).

The co-production of public services is another form of involving citizens in the provision of public services – the idea originated in the United States. This is a model of performing public services based on significant civic participation, non-commercial cooperation, and mixture of public administration and citizen resources (most often service recipients) (Sześciło, 2015a, p. 18). In this model, citizens and civil society organisations co-decide – on equal and partnership terms – on the shape of the public service system, and through their own work they participate in the direct provision of public services. Thus, the citizen is neither a petitioner nor a client but a partner of public administration. Co-production is first of all a practical manifestation of the idea of governance – it reflects postulates of the concept in the organisation of the public service system.

In Poland, co-production involving recipients of public services themselves is scarce. Practical examples are the maintenance of a playground by residents of a housing estate or the running of a community culture centre. Dawid Sześciło (Sześciło, 2015b, pp. 294–300) distinguished six forms of co-production of public services identified in the Polish public management system (regulated by law). These are: 1) supporting the implementation of public services by non-governmental organisations (assumes the involvement of the organisation itself in the form of a specific own contribution), 2) a local initiative (requires the participation of residents in implementation of public task), 3) public-private partnerships (example of market-based model of public service provision, but it can also be used as a co-production mechanism on a non-commercial basis),

4) community councils in public hospitals, 5) parent and school councils in educational institutions, and 6) local action groups (see further).

4. Forms of public participation in governance

This part of the study discusses forms of public participation that enable citizens to have real impact on public affairs and partnership cooperation involving both parties (administration and citizens). The following are discussed: cooperation between administration and NGOs, local action groups, community-led development, civic budget, auxiliary units in communes, and a debate on the state of the local government unit as specified in a relevant report.

Rules of cooperation between administration and non-governmental organisations were defined in the Act of 2003 on public benefit activity and volunteerism. Pursuant to this act, cooperation between administration and non-governmental organisations may take the following forms: commissioning of public tasks to non-governmental organisations, exchange of feedback, consulting of draft normative acts, creating of joint advisory and initiative teams, agreement on implementing a local initiative, and a partnership agreement (Article 5 paragraph 2). After consultations with non-governmental organisations, the decision-making body of a local government unit is obliged to adopt an annual cooperation scheme; it may also adopt a long-term cooperation scheme (Article 5a, paragraphs 1 and 2). According to the Act, the organisations are a partner and not a supplicant for the administration.

In practice, the cooperation often is limited to the fulfilment of statutory obligations by local governments (e.g. preparation of cooperation scheme or commissioning of public task implementation), rather than a platform for building lasting relations based on the principle of partnership. Local governments do not attach much importance to cooperation with NGOs due to their weak financial and organisational condition. They are often not so much a partner for local government units as a beneficiary of public funds (Kołomycew, 2014, p. 140). The difficult budgetary situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the local government's cooperation with non-profit organisations (Narodowy Instytut Wolności, 2021).

Local action groups (LAGs) are partnerships bringing together representatives of local organisations from three sectors (public, private,

and non-governmental) and residents. In fact, they are coalitions for the development of a specific territory, which prepare and implement their own development strategies. In 2014–2020, there were 324 local action groups in Poland whose local development strategies were selected for implementation and funding from the Rural Development Programme. Under the governance concept, actors participating in partnerships should be granted equal status regardless of the sector they come from. However, practice differs from theoretical assumptions. Studies of Polish local action groups indicate a clear domination of local government representatives, little activity on the part of businesses, and poor involvement of non-governmental sector entities. Most often, LAGs are organised by local governments and they retain significant influence in them, especially in the area of allocation of funds for infrastructure projects. In most cases, LAGs do not undertake social animation activities due to lack of adequate financial and personnel resources and sufficient competences (Abramowicz et al., 2019). The diagnosed challenges do not exclude the relevance of the implementation of the LEADER measure and its positive impact on rural development.

An institutionalised instrument for building local partnerships and involving residents is the Community Led Development (CLD), an initiative financed in the 2014–2020 budget perspective from EU funds. The legal basis for this instrument in Poland is the Act of 20 February 2015 on local development with the participation of the local community (*Ustawa z 20 lutego 2015 r. o rozwoju lokalnym z udziałem lokalnej społeczności*). In practice, this instrument is mostly marginalised. This mechanism is missing in the vast majority of regional operational programmes. Where implemented (i.e. in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Podlaskie Provinces), it was assessed by the Province Marshals as definitely positive with regard to activating inhabitants and unlocking local potential. Problems in the implementation of the CLD turned out to be, inter alia, low capacity of potential beneficiaries to provide their own required contribution (Sieci, 2021).

A form of involving residents is the civic budget, also called participatory in the literature. It has been developed in Poland since 2011 and implemented not only by municipalities but also by provincial governments. The civic budget reached a peak of development in 2015, when 136 municipalities (5.5% of the total) managed to implement it. In the following years, the popularity of this tool of participatory democracy decreased to reach equilibrium (Krasnowolski, 2020, pp. 12–13). There has been also

a noticeable decline in the interest of residents in this mechanism. The village fund, implemented since 2010, is popular in villages. In 2018, 72% of all villages in the country had such a fund.

Until recently, the institution of the civic budget in Poland has been an optional institution, not regulated by legislation. In 2018, local government acts introduced provisions stating that the civic budget is a “special form of consultation.” In municipalities that are cities with county rights and the formation of a civic budget there is mandatory (these cities have already implemented such projects), and the value of the budget is at least 0.5% of the municipality’s expenditure as shown in the last budget execution report. Importantly, in the course of work on the budget, the municipal council does not have the right to remove or significantly change tasks selected as part of the civic budget. The literature highlights shortcomings of Polish civic budgets, such as the absence of meetings and interaction with residents, and the failure to make decisions based on consensus or favouring certain groups of residents (Kołodziej-Hajdo, 2017, p. 164).

Public participation is organised in auxiliary units, which may be established by municipal councils on the grounds of the Act on Municipal Self-Government (Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 r. *o samorządzie gminnym*) after consultations with residents regarding their initiative (Article 5). Auxiliary units have no legal personality, no property of their own, and no budget. The situation is better in villages, which since 2009 have had the right to access the village fund. The scope of activity of an auxiliary unit is decided by the decision-making body of the municipality. In practice, these units often have an opinion-making and initiative-making character defined in their statutes. Currently, there are about 40,800 village councils in rural municipalities and about 5,500 auxiliary units in cities.

Surveys show the lack of interest among urban residents in activities of auxiliary units, resulting from their lack of competence and influence on everyday life issues. The circle of activists in auxiliary units is limited to a relatively small group of people (Rajczyk, 2016, pp. 103–107). The bodies of auxiliary units in cities do not have effective tools that would make them important actors in the city governance system (Madej, 2021, p. 103). Moreover, research also indicates poor public awareness. Currently, there is a lack of opportunities (tools) to use the potential of grassroots activity for the development of the auxiliary unit community. In 2019, a draft amendment to the Law on Municipal Self-Government was developed to strengthen the status of the auxiliary unit in order to increase citizen participation in the functioning of the local government.

In order to strengthen control mechanisms and public participation, in 2018, an obligation was imposed on the local government executive body to prepare an annual report on the state of the local government unit. Residents may participate in the debate on the report. The research conducted by Dawid Sześciło and Bartosz Wilk led the authors to the conclusion that the course of debates on the reports, and in particular a very low participation of residents in them, is the biggest failure of this new procedure (Sześciło, Wilk, 2020, pp. 1 and 11).

5. Conclusion

Poland has introduced many legal possibilities for a participatory model of public management. Apart from those discussed above, there are other forms of public involvement, such as evaluation and monitoring of actions taken by the public administration, petitions to public authorities, public hearings, public participation in decision-making concerning environmental protection, and the participation of non-governmental (social) organisations in administrative proceedings. Currently, institutionalised participation and partnership instruments are used rather sporadically and to a large extent they are inspired by supranational (EU) institutions and national authorities and controlled by local authorities. Citizens are still treated more as clients of the public administration than as partners (co-decision-makers). Local authorities are moderately interested in involving citizens in the management of public affairs. Studies indicate a low level of interest among local communities in public affairs, as well as dysfunctions of participation and the façade character of some participatory instruments, including primarily consultations. In conclusion, the mere establishment of a number of different participatory institutions has not guaranteed the involvement of the public and has not resulted in a radical change in the relationship between the local administration and inhabitants. Therefore, there are no grounds for formulating a thesis that there is a real participatory model of management functioning in the Polish local government. The hypothesis proposed in the introduction has therefore been confirmed.

As already mentioned, participation barriers are found both on the part of the local community and the local government. Residents do not get involved for many reasons, including the lack of awareness and competence to participate in local government activities, lack of trust in institutions and political representation, and the presumed lack of influence on

decisions, which was characteristic for the communist period. On the part of local authorities, barriers include low awareness of the culture of co-operation, lack of transparency and openness of local government bodies, poor preparation of the participation process – low quality of consultations, omission of some partners, consultations carried out too late, inability to use knowledge gained through participatory practices, disregarding concerns of residents, and failure to inform residents about the extent to which their opinions are taken into account in decision-making. Local authorities are often under the impression that their democratic mandate gives them the right to make their own decisions without involvement of other actors. Only organizations recognised as political allies or those which can increase public support are invited to cooperate.

Getting rid of these barriers would undoubtedly have a positive impact on the process of public participation. However, the process is not easy and cannot be achieved by legal and legislative instruments alone, as participation and democratic political culture depend on long-term phenomena (“path of dependence”) and cannot be prescribed like medicine. Therefore, in addition to expanding the spectrum of institutional instruments of participation, including e-participation, it is necessary to strengthen the system of incentives and promotion of participation (both for administration and citizens), provide training to local government administration, and educate the public and make wider use of good practices.

To sum up, it is worth emphasising that in Poland citizens have started to be perceived more often as initiators of local changes and development or partners for the local administration. An increasing number of local governments are making attempts to communicate with citizens (websites, regular public meetings, special telephone lines). Further legal regulations aimed at the strengthening of public participation mechanisms are undergoing a legislative process. They correspond to the implementation of the concept of governance, which has been postulated for many years. However, they do not represent a radical turn towards participatory public management, but rather a correction of the existing model of local government democracy.

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Formy partycypacji publicznej w polskim samorządzie terytorialnym

Streszczenie

Celem opracowania jest zaprezentowanie form angażowania obywateli, ich grup i organizacji w sferę działań administracji samorządowej oraz próba udzielenia odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy w polskim samorządzie terytorialnym funkcjonuje partycypacyjny model zarządzania publicznego. Artykuł przedstawia ewolucję relacji między administracją publiczną a obywatelami oraz formy angażowania obywateli w proces decyzyjny, świadczenie usług publicznych i rządy umożliwiające obywatelom realny wpływ na sprawy publiczne. Wyniki analiz wskazują, że w Polsce istnieją formalno-instytucjonalne podstawy dla partycypacji publicznej, ale rzeczywistość społeczna nie daje podstaw do formułowania tezy o realnie funkcjonującym partycypacyjnym modelu zarządzania w samorządzie terytorialnym. W artykule zastosowano podejście instytucjonalno-prawne oraz analizę piśmiennictwa.

Słowa kluczowe: partycypacja publiczna, samorząd terytorialny, Polska