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## AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE MUNICIPAL OFFICES OF ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKIE PROVINCE

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## OCENA FUNKCJONOWANIA URZĘDÓW GMIN MIEJSKICH W WOJEWÓDZTWIE ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKIM

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**Summary:** In this study, the issue of the efficiency of functioning of local government institutions was taken up. The efficient operation of a local government administration office has a significant impact on the development of the local community and satisfying the needs of its residents. The aim of this article is to measure and assess the potential institutional efficiency of municipal offices in the Świętokrzyskie province [voivodeship]. The article uses the institutional analysis method. The research results indicate that the municipalities of the Świętokrzyskie province are characterized by low institutional efficiency, especially in such areas as the provision of public services and the management of human resources. The most favorable situation occurred in the areas of strategic and financial management as well as in social participation and the stimulation of social development.

**Keywords:** local government administration, institutional analysis, institutional efficiency, commune, municipal office.

**Streszczenie:** W niniejszym opracowaniu podjęta została problematyka sprawności działania instytucji samorządowych. Sprawne działanie urzędu administracji samorządowej wywiera istotny wpływ na rozwój wspólnoty lokalnej oraz zaspokojenie potrzeb jej mieszkańców. Celem artykułu są pomiar i ocena potencjalnej sprawności instytucjonalnej urzędów gmin miejskich województwa świętokrzyskiego. W artykule wykorzystano metodę analizy instytucjonalnej. Wyniki badań wskazują, że gminy miejskie województwa świętokrzyskiego charakteryzuje niska sprawność instytucjonalna, szczególnie w takich obszarach, jak świadczenie usług publicznych oraz zarządzanie personelem. Najkorzystniejsza sytuacja była w obszarach: zarządzanie strategiczne i finansowe oraz partycypacja społeczna i stymulowanie rozwoju społecznego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** administracja samorządowa, analiza instytucjonalna, sprawność instytucjonalna, urząd gminy.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, institutions and institutional structures are becoming more and more important in both theory and empirical research. The role of institutions in the economy is increasingly taken into account, interest in institutionalism is growing and statements of the new institutional economy are being incorporated into mainstream economics (Miłaszewicz, 2012, pp. 5-24).

At local level, attention is also being drawn to the fact that socio-economic development does not only depend on the economic base and the possibility of financial support, but more increasingly it is shown that it is dependent on factors of an institutional nature. A key factor in local development is an efficient and effectively operating administration, which requires strengthening its institutional potential (Bober, Mazur, Turowski, and Zawicki, 2004, p. 9).

The aim of the article is to measure and assess the potential institutional efficiency of the municipal offices of the Świętokrzyskie province using the institutional analysis methodology. What distinguishes this method from other projects aimed at modernizing administration is the possibility of its application at all levels of local government and its comprehensiveness, which is expressed in covering the vast majority of areas in which local governments operate within the so-called management areas.

The conducted research is of a pilot nature. The research covered all the municipalities of the province. The article is part of the research on the efficiency and effectiveness of local government units conducted by other scientific centers in Poland (Krakow<sup>1</sup>, Olsztyn<sup>2</sup>, Rzeszów<sup>3</sup>).

## 2. The efficiency of a municipal office as an organization

A municipality is a basic local government unit, formed by its inhabitants in line with the law and having a specific territory. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, a municipality performs all the tasks of local government that have not been reserved for other units – counties [‘powiat’] and provinces [‘voivodeship’]. Municipalities are relatively independent entities of the public sector in Poland and as institutions they play a significant role in the process of stimulating socio-economic development. Nowadays, it is increasingly observed in economics that the institutional aspect is an important factor in local and regional development. In this context, the role of efficient local government institutions, whose authorities are able to successfully benefit from opportunities appearing in the environment and transform them into developing their communities, is increasing. The required

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<sup>1</sup> See (Zawicki, and Mazur, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See (*Sprawność instytucjonalna...* 2017).

<sup>3</sup> See (Grzebyk 2014, pp. 99-100; Grzebyk, and Pierścieniak 2015).

institutional potential allows local government units to provide high quality public services and effectively support the socio-economic development of local communities. As emphasized by Gąciarz (2012, pp. 19-27), the use of development opportunities in local government units largely depends on how local government institutions operate – authorities (resolution-making and executive), offices, agencies and local government enterprises. Therefore it is important to determine patterns of activity (e.g. in the area of policy development and its implementation) that have been created and are maintained by local government activists performing their functions by choice, local government officials and employees of institutions implementing local government tasks. Another important issue concerns the question whether the above activity patterns are accepted by citizens and whether they enable them to participate effectively in solving the affairs of a given community. Hence in order for local government administration offices to realize the tasks fulfilling the existing and emerging needs, it is necessary to strengthen their institutional potential. This term is understood as correct organizational structures, appropriate operating procedures, mechanisms enabling the local community to participate in managing public affairs, as well as competent and efficient officials. The efficiency of public administration activities gains significant importance in the context of the implementation of public services. These tasks can only be implemented properly when public administration, supported by local government institutions, works efficiently.

An important factor affecting the effectiveness of the realization of public services and tasks that municipalities face also concerns the professionalisation of municipal management, e.g. towards strategic management, human resources management, process management, project management and others (Flieger, 2016, p. 8). On the one hand, this indicates the great importance and role of municipalities in stimulating local development, and on the other – the need for the continuous optimization of the area of municipal management (and managing the municipal office) so that this development can be achieved in an effective way. Hence, for more than a decade, special emphasis has been put on reforming and optimizing management systems of public administration. The need to introduce changes in the public sector relates primarily to reducing operating costs and a more effective and efficient way of achieving long and short-term goals achieved by introducing management improvements – often those that have worked well in private sector organizations. One of them includes the use of process management in the organization of structures and activities of the local administration.

The greater the dynamics of changes in the economic and social area, the more serious tasks await local authorities. The role of public administration is also changing and the requirements towards it regarding the quality of services provided are increasing. The main purpose of those changes is to introduce a number of functional improvements at operational level. New public management models are emerging, which are an attempt to coherently present a set of principles, guidelines and postulates regarding the functioning of local administration, the most important

of which include New Public Management (NPM), Good Governance (GG) and Sustained Development (SD) models. One can formulate a thesis that the operational efficiency and quality of services rendered by public administration depends on how public institutions operate. A municipal office is such a public institution. Among other things, the effectiveness of activities of local government depends on the efficiency of the municipal office.

The municipal office is an auxiliary apparatus comprising the municipal head (mayor, president), and this means that it can be defined as a set of material and personnel resources used to perform the competences and tasks of the authorities in the municipality. A municipal office is an organizational unit of a municipality, it provides assistance to the municipal council and its bodies. The municipal head, in turn, performs his/her tasks with the help of the municipal office (Grzebyk, 2014, pp. 99-100). The municipal office is expected to serve the community residing in a given area. He/she should also rationally manage public property. The rules of the functioning of the office are set out in the organizational regulations. Each office should demonstrate high operational efficiency.

Efficiency is a term that is often used in reference to public services and more broadly – to public organization, as well as administration and the state as a whole (Kobylińska, 2013, p. 134).

In the classic praxeological approach, the basic advantages of an organization's efficient operation include: effectiveness (as a measure of the level of achievement of objectives) and cost-effectiveness (as a measure of the level of expenditure on the achieved objectives). In this sense, an organization is considered efficient when it realizes the goals assigned to it and rationally manages its resources (Lisiecki, 2016). The efficiency of activities related to performing public tasks by local government units can be analyzed in two aspects. The first one concerns the efficiency of performing public tasks, and the second the efficiency of the administrative apparatus (Kisala, 2015, pp. 153-164).

There are many theories in the literature through which their authors try to explain the efficiency of democratic institutions, including local government institutions. Based on their analysis, one can distinguish several classic approaches referring to the sources of diversity of this efficiency<sup>4</sup>.

The first of them focuses on the legal and administrative context in which institutions operate and which assumes that an institution's efficiency is primarily determined by the political system and the legal solutions resulting from it, to which all institutions must adhere and within which they can function (Wojtowicz, 2009, pp. 88-89). The second approach emphasizes the role of economic factors, and thus the impact of the level of socio-economic development of the environment in which institutions operate. Another trend indicates the internal resources of individual units, and especially a properly implemented system of managing local

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<sup>4</sup> See (Putnam, 1995, pp. 126-131; Swianiewicz, Dziemianowicz, and Mackiewicz, 2000, p. 16).

governments – structure construction, human resources management, strategic planning, organizational culture etc. This originates from the classic management trend and is based on the achievements of H. Fayol and M. Weber, recognized as the creators of the administrative direction of organization and management theory. The fourth approach is the result of the so-called managerial revolution that began in the 1980s, resulting in many management concepts in the public sector<sup>5</sup>. They significantly influenced the changes in the traditional approach to the model of public administration. The authors' conclusions focused mainly on the need to “transplant” management principles used in the private sector into the public sector. Osborne and Gaebler (1992, p. 43) are considered propagators of this trend, who – while researching selected units in the United States – distinguished several determinants of the efficient functioning of public administration (Wojtowicz, 2009, p. 89).

The general philosophy for the management of local government institutions, which ensures their efficient operation, was also proposed by C.H. Hood. According to Hood, “new public management” should be based on seven main principles: 1) introduction of managerial management, 2) clearly defining the standard and measures of actions taken, 3) emphasis on controlling the results of these activities, 4) introduction of disaggregation of public sector entities, 5) applying the principle of competitiveness, 6) applying the methods and techniques of management used in the private sector, 7) savings and discipline in spending (Hood, 1991, p. 4).

One of the theories which have been developed the most in the last two decades and explains the efficient operation of institutions (including local government institutions) is the theory of civil society based on the high level of social capital. This approach assumes that the efficient functioning of an institution is a convincing basis for explaining economic phenomena, which, however, would be difficult to explain based solely on economic concepts (Wojtowicz, 2009, p. 90).

The close relationship between social capital and local development and the efficient operation of institutions was discussed in the works and proved on the basis of empirical research by many authors (Putnam, 2000; Cusack, 1999; Fukuyama, 1997; Uslaner, 1999). Fukuyama drew attention to the key role of trust as a kind of social binder which is a prerequisite for creating long-lasting forms of cooperation that lead to the effective achievement of goals (Fukuyama, 1997, p. 38). According to the author “trust works like grease which increases the performance of any group or institution” (Fukuyama, 2003, p. 169).

These considerations show that institutional efficiency is not clearly defined in the subject literature, it depends on the adopted criterion and the type of organization concerned by the analysis. It can be interpreted as a feature of the entire organization (efficiency of the institution) or related to the configuration of its elements, resources, principles and understood as a skilful, competent administration that is well-prepared to achieve the intended objectives (institutional efficiency). According to

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<sup>5</sup> See (Potoczek, 2001; Zalewski, 2003; Markowski, 1999).

M. Grzebyk and A. Pierścieniak (2015, p. 42) there is a subtle difference between the efficiency of the organization's functioning (efficiency of the institution) and the efficiency of the local government's functioning understood as an administration caring for the achievement of goals (institutional efficiency). In the case of institutional efficiency analysis at local government level, an important element is the ability to respond to the needs of the local community (a condition resulting from the democratic nature of the institution).

### 3. Research methodology

In their study the author used the Institutional Analysis (IA) method to assess the institutional efficiency of municipalities.

Institutional Analysis as a research tool was developed for the needs of the government's Institutional Development Program (IDP), implemented by the Consortium of the Canadian Urban Institute and the Małopolska School of Public Administration at the Cracow University of Economics on behalf of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. The main goal of IDP was to develop a method of assessing the level of institutional development (organization development status) of public administration units in order to implement improvements. The method consists of three main stages: analysis of the level of institutional development; designing institutional changes and improvements; implementing, monitoring and evaluating the effects of changes introduced (Bober, 2008, p. 127). The institutional analysis of the municipal office is carried out using diagnostic questionnaires. The result of the analysis is a determination of the level of institutional development of the municipal office.

In the IA method the institutional development assessment covered nine areas of management of the municipal office, which were divided into 20 criteria (Table 1).

Each of the management criteria contains a description of five stages (levels) of institutional development of a public administration office. Stage 1 means that the office does not use management instruments appropriate for the given management criterion or uses them to a minimum extent; the office operates (by definition) in accordance with the law, but in a standard way required by that law. For this criterion it was assumed that it is achievable to all offices. The next levels 2,3,4 are the stages characterizing the individual stages of development which gradually pass from the strictly bureaucratic, task-oriented phase, through the phase of procedures, then the phase of active participation (employee or social depending on the criteria). Each subsequent (higher) stage contains ever greater requirements for the use of various types of management techniques or instruments. Stages 2 to 5 contain conditions gradually becoming harder and harder to reach for the office, presenting the potential institutional development path of a given institution (Grzebyk, Pierścieniak 2015, p. 43). The highest stage (5) is such a level of development that can be considered a model one (Bober, 2008, p. 127).

**Table 1.** Areas and management criteria in the Institutional Analysis method

Management area	Management criterion
I. Strategic and financial management	Strategic planning Prospective assessment of the financial situation Multi-year investment planning Annual financial planning, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of plans
II. Organization and functioning of the office	Division of decision-making powers and responsibilities Process management The effectiveness of internal communication
III. Human resources management	Staff recruitment system Employee evaluation and promotion system Training and professional development system
IV. Public services, including communal services	Standards of providing public services Planning to provide public services Improving the provision of public services
V. Social participation and stimulating social development	Communication and social participation Cooperation with non-governmental organizations Supporting social initiatives
VI. Stimulating economic development	Economic development program
VII. Project management	Project management system
VIII. Cooperation between local government units	Implementing projects in cooperation with other local government units
IX. Ethics and prevention of corruption	Shaping ethical attitudes

Source: (Bober, Mazur et al., 2004).

Management criteria have been developed based on the accumulation rule, which means that obtaining a higher stage of development obliges to meet all the conditions for the current stage and all requirements specified for earlier stages. Institutional Analysis allows to determine at which stage of institutional development within each management criterion the office is located and what tasks must be undertaken to increase its institutional potential (Bober, Mazur et al., 2004, p. 11).

The first part of the research consisted in checking whether, and if so, which management tools were used in the municipal offices of the Świętokrzyskie province, and the second part – determining the level of institutional development of municipalities of the province. The research was conducted in 2019 in all five municipalities of the Świętokrzyskie province.



#### 4. Results of own research

Table 2 summarizes the results regarding the level of development of the analyzed management criteria in the municipalities of the Świętokrzyskie province in the form of average indicators calculated for individual areas and management criteria.

**Table 2.** Level of development of individual management criteria in the examined municipal offices in the Świętokrzyskie province

No.	Management area	Average for the management area	Criteria for managing the municipal office	Municipalities
1	Strategic and financial management	3.65	Strategic planning	4.2
			Prospective assessment of the financial situation	5
			Multi-year investment planning	2.8
			Annual financial planning, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of plans	2.6
2	Organization and functioning of the office	3.2	Division of decision-making powers and responsibilities	3.8
			Process management	2.8
			The effectiveness of internal communication	3
3	Human resources management	2.2	Staff recruitment system	2.4
			Employee evaluation and promotion system	1.8
			Training and professional development system	2.4
4	Public services, including communal services	2.3	Standards of providing public services	2.6
			Planning to provide public services	3
			Improving the provision of public services	1.4
5	Social participation and stimulating social development	3.6	Communication and social participation	3.2
			Cooperation with non-governmental organizations	4.2
			Supporting social initiatives	3.4
6	Stimulating economic development	3	Economic development program	3
7	Project management	2.6	Project management system	2.6
8	Cooperation between local government units	3	Implementing projects in cooperation with other local government units	3
9	Ethics and prevention of corruption	2.8	Shaping ethical attitudes	2.8

Source: own study.



The municipalities of the Świętokrzyskie province achieve different levels of development in individual areas of their offices. The average value of the indicator for all municipalities was 3.0. Only one of the municipalities surveyed reached an average value below 3.0, in other units this value was exceeded. The lowest unit values were recorded for the criterion “Improving the provision of public services” (average 1.4) and “Employee evaluation and promotion system” (1.8). The analysis defined public services as public goods in reference to which it is impossible to exclude anyone from using them. The area of public services covers a wide range of activities of a municipality, taking various organizational forms. Services are provided, among others, by budgetary units (e.g. offices), budgetary establishments, and commercial law companies. Within the area of “Public services, including communal services”, three criteria were formulated: standards of providing services, their planning and improvement. While in municipalities there are standards for the provision of services (average value 3) and their plans (2.6), improvement in the provision of these services was rated the lowest among the 20 criteria analyzed.

Within the “Employee evaluation and promotion system” criterion, municipalities achieved such a low average value mainly because the assessment in those units is made in a two-year cycle, and in addition, the results of this assessment are not combined with the personnel policy in the office, e.g. in the field of employee promotion, remuneration or training policy. There are also no rules for updating the periodic evaluation system in all municipalities. At the model level of development of the municipal office within this criterion, an annual employee evaluation is carried out using the applicable evaluation sheets. The results of periodic employee evaluation have an impact on salaries, promotions, employment rationalization and training. The conclusions of the evaluation are used to update and improve the procedures used, as well as the evaluation and promotion tools.

The highest values (for all the units) were recorded for the criterion called “Prospective assessment of the financial situation”, one of the criteria from the first area, which is strategic and financial management. This means that, in terms of this criterion, municipalities have achieved a model level of development, they have a multi-annual financial plan prepared in the perspective covering the entire period of repayment of the existing and planned commitments. A procedure was formulated specifying the principles and dates of the annual update of the multiannual financial plan (Zawicki, and Mazur, 2004, p. 21). High average values (4.2) were recorded in criteria such as “Strategic planning” and “Cooperation between local government units”. This shows that in most municipalities there is a municipal development strategy adopted by the council, a study of the conditions and directions of spatial development of the municipality, there are operational plans for all the objectives adopted in the strategy and that there are documents confirming the implementation of these plans. In addition, the rules for the participation of social partners and business entities in the preparation of the strategy were defined and there are appropriate documents for this, and the budget includes funds for the implementation of the

strategy. The high average value of this criterion indicates that the study of the conditions and directions of spatial development is implemented in accordance with the provisions of the strategy and operational plans and that at least one mandatory sector plan has been prepared and approved in the form of a resolution. The high value for the criterion “cooperation with non-governmental organizations” indicates that the office cooperates with non-governmental organizations.

A significant average value was achieved by the criterion “Division of decision-making powers and responsibilities”, which means that in the examined units, detailed ranges of decision-making powers were identified and assigned to individual municipal bodies: the mayor, president, municipal council, managers and that they were adopted in the form of internal regulations. The “Supporting social initiatives” and “Communication and social participation” criteria were above average.

In the management areas, the best values were recorded for “Strategic and financial management” and “Social participation and stimulating social development”, followed by “Organization and functioning of the office”, “Stimulating economic development” and “Cooperation between local government units”. In the area of “Strategic and financial management” there are large discrepancies between the individual criteria: strategic planning, prospective assessment of the financial situation and other criteria in this area. Areas related to project management and shaping ethical attitudes also require improvement in performance. “Human resources management” and “Public services” are definitely the lowest-performing areas.

## 5. Conclusions

The results of the analysis of the level of institutional development of local government administration offices of the municipalities of the Świętokrzyskie province indicate several important issues:

1. The municipal offices of the Świętokrzyskie province are characterized by low institutional efficiency. In four out of nine areas analyzed, the offices achieved a result below the average value.

2. The least favorable situation concerned the area of human resources management and public services, while the most favorable referred to the field of strategic and financial management, social participation and stimulating social development. The organization and functioning of the office as well as cooperation between local government units also obtained high values in the assessment.

3. On the basis of the conducted research, it can be stated that the offices of the municipalities of the Świętokrzyskie province require actions to improve their potential efficiency and better performance of tasks. This applies in particular to the improvement of public services, the employee evaluation and promotion system. Greater efficiency is also required in areas such as project management and shaping ethical attitudes.

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