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**Local government social policy in urban and rural communes of the Greater Poland Voivodeship in 2015-2019**

Doctoral dissertation

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**Summary**

Local government plays a significant role in the social life of a democratic society. The life of society depends to a large extent on the social policy pursued in a given country. In Polish conditions, the lowest level of local government are communes and they implement a significant part of the social policy created by the state, as well as influence part of it themselves.

Therefore, it seems reasonable to ask two key questions: is the commune's social policy shaped mainly by objective external factors? is social policy independently shaped by its local authorities?

The research was carried out using the diagnostic survey method in urban-rural communes of the Wielkopolskie Voivodship, i.e. in the commune of Chocz, in the commune of Dobrzyca, in the commune of Koźmin Wielkopolski and in the commune of Żerków. The compared communes were somewhat similar to each other, because all of them are characterized not only by the type of urban-

rural commune, but also by the fact that they all fall into the category of small communes. The number of such communes is significant, as rural-urban communes account for 41% in the voivodship, and those described as small communes account for almost 80% of the lowest level of local government in the Wielkopolska voivodeship.

In the course of the study, mainly existing statistical data was used, with the use of other techniques to a lesser extent. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods in the study, the strategy of methodological triangulation was used. The study covered the period 2015-2019, which illustrated a certain dynamism of changes in the social policy carried out by the communes resulting from the introduction of the government program: "Family 500 plus" and gave a picture of the period until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced changes in the social policy.

It is obvious that the commune local government deals with various aspects of social policy, including running kindergartens, primary schools, being the founding body for primary health care facilities, and combating poverty and exclusion. These tasks are carried out both directly by the local government, local government institutions, and through cooperation with non-governmental organizations and (NGO). These tasks are financed mainly from the state budget, and only in a smaller part from own funds.

The image of communes, which results from the work, may prove that they have certain resources to effectively implement social policy both directly by the commune, as well as through non-governmental organizations existing in them. It can be noticed that apart from traditional organizations of this type, such as farmers' wives' associations, new types are being created, open to new needs of functioning in a modern society, most often taking the form of local associations with the goals of improving the well-being of a given community, which is clearly in line with the implementation of social policy. Some of the traditional forms of social activity evolve in a natural way (rural wives' associations, volunteer fire

brigades), others experience a period of stagnation or even shrinking (agricultural associations), which have not yet found a formula for effective development in the new times. The development of various forms of non-governmental organizations in individual communes, although similar, has a certain specificity for a given commune, e.g. in the commune of Koźmin Wielkopolski one can say about a particularly large number of volunteer fire brigades or in the commune of Dobrzyca about the high activity of local associations. It is worth noting that while in the Koźmin Wielkopolski commune this fact can be attributed to the particularly active role of the individual, in the Dobrzyca commune the increase and activity of these associations is the result of the commune's decision to transform schools into schools run by associations.

This does not mean, however, that the answer to the research questions posed could suggest that the commune local government independently shapes social policy. This answer cannot be such, not only because the commune local government had no direct influence on the emergence of a very active unit in the commune of Koźmin Wielkopolski. Similarly, increasing social activity in the commune of Dobrzyca through local associations was not the goal, but rather a side effect of seeking a solution to the excessive burden of the commune budget with tasks in the area of education in the commune of Dobrzyca. The most important reason for the low impact on shaping social policy by local government in communes is the way it is financed. Most of the funds allocated to this policy are funds provided by the state, and most of the tasks carried out are entrusted tasks. The overwhelming influence of the state administration on the social policy implemented by communes is evidenced by two evidence proved in this work. The first of them is the fact that when comparing the percentage level of expenditure from the budget of individual communes on particular forms of social policy, i.e. housing, physical culture, culture and national heritage, education and upbringing, pro-family policy, health care, social assistance and other tasks in the field of social policy, there is an unprecedented level of correlation between all

communes, i.e. from 0.996 to 0.998. Such a high level of the correlation coefficient, even not recorded in statistical presentations, clearly proves that the local government spends funds for the implementation of social policy in a manner necessary to meet the requirements of the law and meet the basic needs of residents. The second fact proving the small influence of the commune self-government on the implementation of social policy may be the moment of the introduction of the government program "Family 500+" captured in the study, where the percentage of communes' expenditure on pro-family policy or on social assistance and other tasks in in the field of social policy.

This work proves that the social policy pursued by the commune local government is shaped mainly by objective external factors, and not by local authorities.

It can be noticed that this condition is not good, considering the human potential and aspirations that lie in the society and in the already established local government, which is a fact especially in relation to its lowest level. From the point of view of social life and social policy, it would be beneficial to increase the decision-making power of the local government as to the directions of spending funds for social policy. While maintaining the existing forms of financing the tasks of the local government, which it performs on behalf of the state, it would be worth considering increasing the income of the local government or increasing the special-purpose subsidy without a precise definition, but intended for various spheres of social policy. The emergence of this type of measures would lead to the use of specific possibilities of a given community, increasing the opportunities that a given commune has, as well as preventing certain problems specific to a given commune, the elimination of which would be possible with the support of specific activities in the field of social policy.

Such steps seem to be necessary on the way to building social well-being, because only local government officials have a real understanding of the needs and possibilities of their communities.

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